

The Image of Shell Shock:
Psychological Trauma, Masculinity, and the
Great War in British and American Cinema

by
Jobe Close

A thesis submitted to the University of Birmingham
for the degree of Master of Arts by Research

Department of Film and Creative Writing
College of Arts and Law
University of Birmingham
January 2017

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Abstract

The profound brutality and absurdity of the First World War has been meticulously detailed in the cinematic representations of the conflict. At their epicentre, we frequently find the symbolic figure of the shell-shocked man, who, overcome by the fear and exhaustion that loomed over the trenches and battlefields of the Western Front, was often condemned as failing to meet expected standards of masculine behaviour. This filmic fixation reflects the dominant cultural perception of a war of which shell shock came to be emblematic, giving rise to a considerable scholarship on the social, medical, martial, and political discourses by which the disorder was surrounded. What is lacking is any substantial examination of how shell shock has been interpreted by filmmakers. Focussing on British and American cinema from 1916 to 2014, this thesis explores shell shock's cinematic identity chiefly in terms of masculinity, its most central historical theme. It argues that filmmakers have tended to return to the Great War and its most famous malady during historical periods of marked social consciousness, turbulence, or discovery in areas of thematic importance to the disorder – gender, mental health, or military conflict – and examines the relationship between these films and their historical contexts.

Acknowledgements

There are a handful of very important people without whom the conception and completion of this project would have been impossible. My first thanks must go to Rob Smith, who introduced me to its fascinating subject. For his history class I wrote two thousand words that inspired the forty thousand contained in these pages. My supervisor, Michele Aaron, has been an invaluable source of insightful comments and thoughtful criticism, without which this idea could never have come to fruition. To the Heaven family, your warmth and generosity has truly gone above and beyond, especially during the year in which I was working on this project. Emily – thank you for all the advice, encouragement, and of course, badminton. I wouldn't be writing this now if it wasn't for your friendship over the last five years. And finally to my family: Mom, Tim, Luke, Billie, Jule, and Nan, I would have to write another thesis to cover all of the reasons I have to love and be grateful to you, so I'll leave it at this: thank you all, for everything.

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Introduction

Future Lieutenant Colonel, British spy, Military Cross recipient, veteran of two world wars, and noted London eccentric Alfred D. Wintle was just a teenager when, in 1916, he saw action in the Great War. During his first night on the Western Front the sergeant to whom he had just been introduced was hit by a shell and killed, showering the young soldier in his remains. Rather than succumb to the horror of the event, so the story goes, Wintle stood immediately to attention, as shells continued to fall around him, and saluted. This ‘miraculously did the trick,’ he would later write. ‘Within thirty seconds I was able to become again an Englishman of action and to carry out calmly the duties I had been trained to perform.’¹

Wintle’s experience was far from rare among the soldiers who fought in the trenches of the First World War; his reaction to it, however, certainly was. Confronted with conditions and experiences of untold horror and unimaginable stress and fear, many reacted with psychological breakdown, in order to, as the American physician Thomas W. Salmon later put it, ‘escape from an intolerable situation in real life to one made tolerable by the neurosis.’² The British army alone reported 80,000 cases of shell shock – later, and more accurately, known as war neuroses – by the end of the war; the actual figure, according to recent research, could be significantly higher.³ The stoicism of Wintle, who demonstrated (insofar as we have faith in the veracity of his story) a masculine ideal towards which men were trained not only in military service but throughout their lives, was a near-impossibility; the war itself, as Virginia Woolf would aptly label it, a ‘preposterous masculine fiction.’⁴ Shell shock became, and remains,

¹ A. D. Wintle, *The Last Englishman: an autobiography of Lieut.-Col. Alfred Daniel Wintle, M.C. (1st the Royal Dragoons)* (London: Michael Joseph, 1968), 36. See also James Wilson, ‘The last Englishman’, *New Law Journal* (26 July 2013) <www.newlawjournal.co.uk/content/last-englishman>.

² Thomas W. Salmon, ‘The Care and Treatment of Mental Diseases and War Neurosis (“Shell Shock”) in the British Army’, in *The Medical Department of the United States Army in the World War, Vol. X: Neuropsychiatry* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1929), 506.

³ See Jay Winter, ‘Shell shock’, in Winter, J. (ed.), *The Cambridge History of the First World War, Vol. 3: Civil Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 328-30.

⁴ This description appears in a letter from Woolf to her friend Margaret Llewelyn Davies, dated 23 January 1916. See Virginia Woolf & Joanne Trautmann Banks (ed.), *Congenial Spirits: The Selected Letters of Virginia Woolf* (San Diego, CA; New York; London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1990), 89.

emblematic of the First World War, and the stigma of emasculation suffered by these men is one aspect that has dominated the war's cultural legacy: particularly in intellectual thought and literature, television and the cinema. It is in this latter arena, the visual and narrative conception of shell shock and its sufferers on the big screen, with which this thesis is concerned.

This is a study, then, of the moving image. More specifically, it is a study of a group of often very different film texts that all concern themselves, in multiple and various ways, with a common historical phenomenon. It is in the essential nature of the historical film to reflect, represent and interpret the historical reality that they take as all or part of their subject – as the critic Fredric Jameson has argued, history is not in itself a text, but is ‘inaccessible to us except in textual form,’ necessarily passing through a process of textualisation and narrativisation.⁵ Effective textual analysis of filmic narrativisations of history necessitates a certain level of understanding of the historical discourses that these films seek to reproduce and represent. This thesis is thus an interdisciplinary one, firmly rooted in textual cinematic analysis, but drawing heavily upon historical research as a vital supplement.

Literature Review

As a multidisciplinary study bridging a group of disciplines as diverse as film studies, history, psychology, and gender and cultural studies, this thesis is indebted to the work of scholars in each of these fields. While it is its established aim to rectify a gap that exists between the scholarship on shell shock and on cinema, it is only thanks to the copious and invaluable body of work surrounding the subject that there exists a small opening in the recorded knowledge for this project to exploit.

Ben Shephard's *A War of Nerves* is the most complete historical overview and chronology of shell shock in its British and American contexts.⁶ It is just one contribution,

⁵ Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (London; New York: Routledge, 2002), 20.

⁶ Ben Shephard, *A War of Nerves: Soldiers and Psychiatrists, 1914-1994* (London: Pimlico, 2002). The sheer size and variety of the body of work on shell shock and its various impacts means that it would be impossible to take it all into account here. I have therefore limited the scope of this review to the most essential works and those that have had a particular impact on this thesis.

however, to a rich and ever-growing body of scholarship on the reactions to the phenomenon in various realms. The contemporary work of Edgar Jones and Simon Wessely, who take a principally psychiatric line of enquiry separately and in collaboration, is especially central, as are the contributions of Allan Young and Hans Binneveld, who, like Jones and Wessely, have traced the evolution of nervous debility and psychiatric medicine, including shell shock, to its more contemporary analogues. Jay Winter's work focusses on the cultural legacy of the phenomenon in the post-war world; Peter Barham has looked specifically at working-class sufferers – at the “forgotten lunatics” of a war whose officers have been at the centre of much of the academic and cultural attention – and Mark S. Micale and Paul Lerner have positioned the disorder within a wider history of men and trauma.⁷ Primary sources add an essential extra dimension to the insights of modern scholars, particularly in terms of how the disorder was initially met with interest and uncertainty, and how understanding developed. The official post-war reports of the British War Office and U.S. Army on the successes and failings of wartime psychiatry are noteworthy⁸, as are the writings of physicians and psychologists who treated shell shock patients: Charles Myers (especially his three influential *Lancet* articles and 1940 war diary⁹), W. H. R. Rivers, Lewis Yealland, G. Elliot Smith, T. H. Pear, and Thomas Salmon, to name only a significant few.¹⁰ Despite my focus on Britain and America, the

⁷ Edgar Jones & Simon Wessely, *Shell Shock to PTSD: Military Psychiatry from 1900 to the Gulf War* (Hove; New York: Psychology Press, 2005); Jay Winter, ‘Shell-shock and the Cultural History of the Great War’, *Journal of Contemporary History*, 35:1 (2000); Allan Young, *The Harmony of Illusions: Inventing Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995); Hans Binneveld, *From Shellshock to Combat Stress: A Comparative History of Military Psychiatry* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1997); Peter Barham, *Forgotten Lunatics of the Great War* (New Haven, CT; London: Yale University Press, 2004); Mark S. Micale, *Hysterical Men: The Hidden History of Male Nervous Illness* (Cambridge, MA; London: Harvard University Press 2008); Mark S. Micale & Paul Lerner (eds.), *Traumatic Pasts: History, Psychiatry, and Trauma in the Modern Age, 1870-1930* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

⁸ *Report of the War Office Committee of Enquiry into “Shell-Shock”* (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1922); *The Medical Department of the United States Army in the World War, Vol. X*.

⁹ Charles S. Myers, ‘A contribution to the study of shell shock.: Being an account of three cases of loss of memory, vision, smell, and taste, admitted into the Duchess of Westminster's War Hospital, Le Touquet’, *The Lancet*, 185:4772 (1915); ‘Contributions to the Study of Shell Shock.: Being an account of certain disorders of cutaneous sensibility’, *The Lancet*, 187:4829 (1916); ‘A Final Contribution to the Study of Shell Shock.: Being a consideration of unsettled points needing investigation’, *The Lancet*, 193:4976 (1919); *Shell Shock in France, 1914-1918: based on a war diary* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1940).

¹⁰ W. H. R. Rivers, ‘An Address on the Repression of War Experience’, *The Lancet*, 191:4927 (1918); Lewis R. Yealland, *Hysterical Disorders of Warfare* (London: Macmillan, 1918); G. Elliot Smith, ‘Shock and the Soldier’,

significant contributions from mainland Europe, by the likes of Clovis Vincent in France and Max Nonne in Germany, are also worth noting.¹¹ It is also worth mentioning the not insubstantial collection of public reactions to the news of shell shock that survive from the period in the form of newspaper and magazine articles, that offer a fascinating and valuable insight and alternative perspective on the issue.¹² The gendered discourse surrounding the advent of shell shock has, finally, been a source of fierce contention, and forms the backbone of this thesis. The debates in which Elaine Showalter, Joanna Bourke and Jessica Meyer have been major players are, thus, explored in more detail throughout.¹³

As I have mentioned, it is in shell shock's cinematic manifestations that I locate a dearth of scholarly insight. In the scholarship on another form of cultural representation, literature, there is no such lack. Critics including Showalter, Meyer, Trevor Dodman, Johanna Church, Wyatt Bonikowski, and – most famously – Paul Fussell have offered various critical readings of the traumas of the Great War in a literary canon to which major works by Ernest Hemingway, Virginia Woolf, Rebecca West, Pat Barker, Siegfried Sassoon, Wilfred Owen, Robert Graves and others belong.¹⁴ In the relevant areas of film studies – on cinema's links with

The Lancet, 187:4834 (1916); G. Elliot Smith & T. H. Pear, *Shell Shock and Its Lessons* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1917); Salmon, 'Care and Treatment'.

¹¹ Max Nonne, 'Über erfolgreiche Suggestivbehandlung der hysteriformen Störungen bei Kriegsneurosen ('On successful suggestive treatment of hysteriform disturbances in War Neuroses'), *Zeitschrift für die gesamte Neurologie und Psychiatrie*, 37 (1917); Clovis Vincent, 'Contribution to the Study of the Manifestations of Emotional Shock on the Battlefield', *The Lancet*, 193:4976 (1917).

¹² To cite just one of many examples, see Anon., 'Battle Shock. The Wounded Mind and its Cure. A Special Hospital', *The Times* (25 May 1915).

¹³ Elaine Showalter, *The Female Malady: Women, Madness & English Culture, 1830-1980* (London: Virago, 1987); Joanna Bourke, *Dismembering the Male: Men's Bodies, Britain and the Great War* (London: Reaktion Books, 1999); Jessica Meyer, *Men of War: Masculinity and the First World War in Britain* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009); Jessica Meyer, 'Separating the Men from the Boys: Masculinity and Maturity in Understandings of Shell Shock in Britain', *Twentieth Century British History*, 20:1 (2009); Jessica Meyer, 'Gladder to be going out than afraid': Shellshock and heroic masculinity in Britain, 1914-1919', in Macleod, J. & Purseigle, P. (eds.), *Uncovered Fields: Perspectives in First World War Studies* (Leiden: Brill, 2004).

¹⁴ Showalter, *The Female Malady*, 190-94; Meyer, 'Separating the Men from the Boys', 14-20; Trevor Dodman, *Shell Shock, Memory, and the Novel in the Wake of World War I* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015); Johanna Church, 'Literary Representations of Shell Shock as a Result of World War I in the Works of Virginia Woolf and Ernest Hemingway', *Peace & Change*, 41:1 (2016); Wyatt Bonikowski, *Shell Shock and the Modernist Imagination: The Death Drive in Post-World War I British Fiction* (London; New York: Routledge, 2013); Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013, first published 1975).

and representation of history, war (of the First World War specifically and military conflict generally), masculinity, psychology and psychiatry – there is also, of course, no shortage.¹⁵

General Introduction: Hysterical Women to Shell-shocked Men

From the global scale of the Great War arose a global epidemic of shell shock cases, with each combatant nation producing a particular set of medical, martial, political, and social discourses surrounding the disorder. It would be impossible, in a study of this scope, to do justice to every one of these. Thus, I have imposed limitations in an attempt to maintain sufficient attention to detail. Firstly, I focus on two combatants – the United Kingdom and the United States. The second “restriction” was guided more by the subject matter itself: the theme of gender, especially of masculinity, is pervasive and inescapable in any study of shell shock – in fact, as I shall go on to elucidate, it may not have developed at all as a medical concept were it not for the existence of precise and deep-seated societal constructs of gender in the period preceding the First World War. It is almost always a fundamental concern in both the historical response to shell shock and its cinematic treatments, thus I take it as the central theme of this study.

In order to understand masculinity in terms of cinema’s reflections on shell shock as a wartime phenomenon, we must first understand the gendered qualities of the historical reaction to the disorder. This, in turn, needs to be contextualised within the pre-war time period, during which constructions of gender and attitudes towards mental health and psychiatry intertwined to shape the response to the sudden epidemic of psychological breakdown following 1914. I will trace this contextual timeline in relation to each nation before moving into the film analyses that constitute the most substantial part of this study. First, though, a more general introduction to these themes and concepts – the pre-war background shared by the two nations then in the context of the war itself – is warranted.

¹⁵ Again, I cite here just one seminal example of each in a crowded and complex body of work: Pierre Sorlin, *The Film in History: Restaging the Past* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1980); Michael Paris (ed.), *The First World War and Popular Cinema: 1914 to the Present* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999); James Chapman, *War and Film* (Trowbridge: Reaktion Books, 2008); Steven Cohan & Ina Rae Hark (eds.), *Screening the Male: Exploring Masculinities in Hollywood Cinema* (London; New York: Routledge, 1993); Glen O. Gabbard & Krin Gabbard, *Psychiatry and the Cinema*, 2nd ed. (Washington, DC; London: American Psychiatric Press, 1999).

The historical and medical roots of shell shock can be found in hysteria, an archaic and now clinically unrecognised umbrella term for a broad range of psychopathologies. From its earliest appearances in medical discourse, it has been situated firmly within the realm of the feminine. Consider the etymology. *Hysteria* derives from the Latin *hystericus* (“of the womb”) from the Greek *hysterikos* (“suffering in the womb”). In ancient Egyptian, Greek and Roman writings, including those of Hippocrates, the term encompassed a set of conditions that occurred in women as a result of “suffocation of the mother.” “The premise was that if the patient had no frequent sexual intercourse, the uterus would be “frustrated” by lack of proper use, leave its anatomical position and move around the body causing the symptoms,’ a phenomenon often referred to as “wandering womb.” ‘Hippocrates himself described hysteria as occurring in either widows or virgins, resulting from the neurotoxic effects of the “frustrated uterus”.’¹⁶

Uterine and gynaecological theories of hysteria persisted well into the 19th century.¹⁷ Despite their decline, the ideological gender gap in attitudes towards and treatments of mental disorder, including hysteria, remained. Micale explains the roots of what he calls the ‘wholesale suppression of the idea of male hysteria’ that dominated medical thought from the late 18th century until the events of the First World War cast doubt over its assumptions:

During the three-quarters of a century running from 1790 to 1860, medical science and practice were aggressively pressed into the service of discovering and maintaining a regime of difference between the sexes. A new drive to base the putatively pervasive differences between the sexes in nature developed, and biomedical knowledge that emphasized the contrasts and oppositions between men and women came to the fore. Conversely, anything that called into question the new gender dichotomies ... was officially ignored, discredited, or despised. Not surprisingly, the concept of hysteria in the male sex during these years became submerged, rhetorically and ideologically, appearing only as the story of evasions, resistances, and silences. In dramatic contrast, discourses of female hysteria during the first half of the nineteenth century thrived as never before.¹⁸

¹⁶ Hélio Afonso Ghizoni Teive, Francisco M. B. Germiniani, Renato Puppi Munhoz & Luciano De Paola, ‘126 hysterical years - the contribution of Charcot’, *Arquivos de Neuro-Psiquiatria* (*Archives of Neuropsychiatry*), 72:8 (2014), 637.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ Micale, *Hysterical Men*, 49-50.

Hysteria, as Showalter's seminal 1987 monograph illustrates, was a 'quintessential female malady.'¹⁹ She claims that 'by the end of the [nineteenth] century, "hysterical" had become almost interchangeable with "feminine" ... [it] was linked with the essence of the "feminine" in a number of ways. Its vast, unstable repertoire of emotional and physical symptoms – fits, fainting, vomiting, choking, sobbing, laughing, paralysis ... suggested the lability and capriciousness traditionally associated with the feminine nature.'²⁰ The variations in my chosen cultures' histories and traditional definitions of manliness are often significant, and will be explored in more detail later. It is important to note here, however, that the manifestations of hysteria described by Showalter were associated not simply with the effeminate, but held in opposition to an established idea of masculinity that, in its broadest sense, differed little between British and American culture. As George L. Mosse states of this period, 'there was a consensus ... about what it meant to be a 'true man' ... [he] was a man of action who controlled his passions, and who in his harmonious and well-proportioned bodily structure expressed his commitment to moderation and self-control.'²¹

Cases of nervousness and mental breakdown in men – comparable with, but infrequently labelled as, hysteria – was increasing in the years leading up to 1914. There were a number of factors that contributed to the gradual deterioration of this gender dichotomy. It has been theorised that this perceived decline in the state of men's nerves was a product of their rapidly and drastically changing environment. In 1887 James Muir Howie noticed that conditions of living had been 'getting more artificial ... for several generations,' the nervous system 'goaded to continuous exertion and subjected to constant strain.'²² New and unfamiliar pressures were brought upon modern life by the processes of industrialisation and urbanisation, and the advent of new technologies, such as railways, were catalysts of previously inconceivable traumatic experiences. There has been a good deal written, for instance, about so-called "railway spine," the traumatic neurotic response to railway accidents, and its place on

¹⁹ Showalter, *The Female Malady*, 129.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ George L. Mosse, 'Shell-shock as a Social Disease', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 35:1 (2000), 101.

²² James Muir Howie, 'The Nerve-Rest Cure', *The Nineteenth Century: A Monthly Review* (November 1887), 659.

the historical timeline of trauma.²³ Allied to this, as Micale and Lerner claim, is the gendered character of the sites of these traumas – ‘trauma, as constructed by late nineteenth-century medicine and society, involved sites of predominately male activity, such as rail travel [and] factory production.’²⁴ Psychological collapse in men, then, was justified as being traumatic in origin, but the clear separation of the sexes was nevertheless beginning to show signs of weakening. As Sally Ledger contends, ‘the recurrent theme of the cultural politics of the *fin de siècle* was instability, and gender was arguably the most destabilizing category.’²⁵

Despite the pressures of an industrialised, ‘artificial’ turn-of-the-century world, and the potent mixture of a fluctuating concept of manliness and resistance to traditional masculine ideals, in the immediate pre-war years there continued to exist a definite gender gap where mental health was concerned. While male nervous cases were most often diagnosed as neurasthenia (or nervous exhaustion), genuine hysteria remained an ailment firmly associated with the female sex.²⁶ The outbreak of the First World War, and the consequent shell shock epidemic, would signal the beginning of the end of this common perception. John V. H. Dippel has posited that a great number of the men who went to war did so in an effort to combat the ever-increasing threat of the so-called ‘unacknowledged enemy,’ the educated, enlightened, and liberated New Woman, to the superiority of the male sex.²⁷ It is ironic, then, that so many would

²³ See Anon., ‘Railway Spine’, *The British Medical Journal*, 2:1508 (1889); Thomas Keller, ‘Railway Spine Revisited: Traumatic Neurosis or Neurotrauma?’, *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences*, 50 (1995).

²⁴ Mark S. Micale & Paul Lerner, ‘Trauma, Psychiatry, and History: A Conceptual and Historiographical Introduction’, in Micale & Lerner (eds.), *Traumatic Pasts*, 23.

²⁵ Sally Ledger, ‘The New Woman and the crisis of Victorianism’, in Ledger, S. & McCracken, S. (eds.), *Cultural Politics at the fin de siècle* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 22.

²⁶ Shephard, *A War of Nerves*, 10.

²⁷ Beyond this, Dippel seems to imply that the success of the women’s movement not only provided motivation for men to enlist, but also the impetus behind governments’ decisions to declare war in the first place, which offers an insight into the centrality of gender issues: ‘World War I provides a prime example of how mounting domestic pressures can lead to hostilities. While some historians have categorized this as a “cabinet war” – an extension of politics by other means, akin to those fought in Europe during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries – this approach overlooks the social pressures on national leaders to declare war. These, I would argue, were so compelling that governments felt it would be perilous to ignore them ... The collective state of mind that welcomed war in 1914 was not geopolitical in nature ... Rather, going to war was a way to attack and defeat an enemy much closer to home ... This other enemy was none other than the opposite sex – specifically, those women who were then defying traditional gender norms and entering domains once reserved exclusively for men.’ John V. H. Dippel, ‘Avenging the Primal Wound: Women as the Unacknowledged Enemy in World War I’, *Peace & Change*, 41:1 (2016), 13-14.

see their image of masculinity undermined by the very malady that had come to highlight women's supposed psychological weakness and to malign and refute their campaign for equality.

It is no coincidence that the nature of the conflict reflected the industrialised world in which it took place. The war was marked by a new brand of combat and therefore new forms of combat injury. The advent of trench warfare, associated with long periods of inaction, conducive of mental and physical stagnation, and shrouded in a constant fear of the threat of artillery bombardment, engendered psychiatric disorders unfamiliar to military doctors who were used to treating physical ailments.²⁸ The British psychologist C. S. Myers first published the term "shell-shock" in 1915, theorising a concussion-like condition of helplessness, hysteria and loss of sense and memory, brought on by the physical impact of a shell exploding nearby.²⁹ He soon realised, however, that many patients presented with these symptoms without any indication of bodily injury, proving the term to be a misnomer: 'Most victims were suffering instead from the general combat situation, with its physical fatigue, ever-present threat of death or mutilation, and severe psychological shocks.'³⁰ Despite this, it remained a popular one to describe the condition, especially in the public sphere.

Shell shock became an umbrella term for a range of manifestations of the psychological stresses associated with this novel form of warfare. Symptoms could include, but were certainly not limited to, memory loss, anxiety, paralysis, abnormal gait, blindness, deafness, loss of taste and smell, inability to stand or speak, vomiting, nightmares and insomnia, depression, dizziness and disorientation, the "shakes," and loss of volitional movement.³¹ Treatments ranged from the disciplinary, including the use of electroconvulsive therapy, to more sympathetic, analytical methods. Often, they were motivated not by genuine sympathy but a desire to return the soldier to the front as quickly as possible.

²⁸ Peter Howorth, 'The treatment of shell-shock: Cognitive therapy before its time', *Psychiatric Bulletin*, 24 (2000), 226.

²⁹ Myers, 'A contribution to the study of shell shock'.

³⁰ Rebecca J. Anderson, 'Shell Shock: An Old Injury with New Weapons', *Molecular Interventions*, 8:5 (2008), 205; James N. Butcher, Susan Mineka & Jill M. Hooley, *Abnormal Psychology*, 15th ed. (London: Pearson, 2013), 157.

³¹ Shephard, *A War of Nerves*, 1; Anderson, 'An Old Injury', 205; Myers, 'A contribution to the study of shell shock'.

‘There was then and is now,’ Winter suggests, ‘no consensus as to the order of magnitude of the incidence of shell shock.’³² In Britain, the reported incidence of psychiatric battle casualties of 2-4% of total admissions could in fact be closer to 20%.³³ This inaccuracy could be attributable to the attitude of the medical profession, public and, especially, the army towards the condition and its sufferers. Men afflicted with shell shock were frequently branded cowards or malingerers and, in some cases, charged by Court Martial. Of the 346 men executed by the British army between 1914 and 1920, 266 were for the crime of desertion and 18 for cowardice.³⁴ And with medical testimony associated with these cases very often ‘remarkable for its absence,’ it seems fair to suggest that in many of these cases the victim could have been suffering from shell shock.³⁵

In 1916, the anatomist and anthropologist Grafton Elliot Smith wrote that ‘there are men quite capable and morally unassailable whose nervous system is positively unfitted for the hardships and horrors of war. They have enthusiasm and the best of intentions, but this mental inspiration does not continue when the horrors and terrors come.’³⁶ In a July 2014 lecture to the British Academy, Jay Winter echoed the sentiment of Dr. Smith’s words.³⁷ Written some ninety-eight years apart, they both make the argument that there was an overwhelming discrepancy between the expectations of mental fortitude placed upon soldiers and the capacity of many of these men to cope with the impossible psychological burden of trench warfare.³⁸ ‘Military manliness’ prior to 1914, Winter argues, was defined by a soldier’s ability to resist the pressures of warfare. This ideal was rendered impossible to sustain under the ‘exponential’

³² Winter, ‘Shell shock’, 328.

³³ See *ibid.*, 328-30.

³⁴ Cathryn Corns, ‘Shot at Dawn’: Military Executions in the Great War’, *The RUSI Journal*, 143:1 (1998), 53.

³⁵ Shephard, *A War of Nerves*, 69.

³⁶ Smith, ‘Shock and the Soldier’, 853.

³⁷ Jay Winter, ‘Shell Shock and the Emotional History of the First World War’, Lecture to the British Academy, London (9 July 2014) <www.youtube.com/watch?v=exw0iKVjvOY>.

³⁸ See Elaine Showalter, ‘Hysteria, Feminism, and Gender’, in Gilman, S. L., King, H., Porter, R., Rousseau, G. S., & Showalter, E., *Hysteria Beyond Freud* (London: University of California Press, 1993), 325, on what she calls the ‘exploitation of manliness.’ She notes that recruitment techniques for the British Army were often based upon ‘appeals to “traditional masculine virtues” and “promises of “the fulfilment of masculinity on the battlefield.”’ See also Martin Stone, ‘Shellshock and the Psychologists’, in Bynum, W. F., Porter, R. & Shepherd, M. (eds.), *The Anatomy of Madness, Vol. II: Institutions and Society* (London: Tavistock, 1985), 242-71.

increase in mental stress brought on by the advent of an industrialised form of combat. With no time to adapt, ‘training or appeals to manliness provided no defence’ against near-constant artillery barrage and its associated horrors. Shell shock was a ‘normative crisis’ for masculinity; the hardy, emotionally inhibited gentlemanly ideal impossible to attain under such circumstances. ‘Placed in intolerable circumstances of stress, and expected to react with unnatural “courage,” Showalter asserts, ‘thousands of soldiers reacted instead with the symptoms of hysteria.’ Male hysteria, as she calls it, was born.³⁹ Shell shock was perceived by many as a breakdown or transgression of dominant cultural and social norms of masculinity. Historians have further delineated this perception, showing how it has been characterised as a regression to or transformation into an “anti-masculine” state – most notably, as Jessica Meyer argues, femininity and childishness.⁴⁰

We have already covered the arguments of Showalter and others, who have discussed how displaying symptoms of shell shock carried a stigma of feminisation. Meyer has offered an alternate gendered reading of war neurosis and wartime masculinity not as a transition from the masculine to the feminine but from the man to the boy; not effeminate, but infantilising:

The gendering of soldiers in wartime ... was not simply one of masculine versus feminine, although this dichotomy undoubtedly played a part in recruitment, politics and other aspects of ... wartime society. Masculinity in the era of the First World War was defined as much by distinctions between the child and the adult, the boy and the man, as by those between the man and the woman ... in [late 19th and early 20th century] understandings of ‘manliness,’ the shaping contrast was less with the “feminine” and more with the “bestial,” non-human, childlike, or immature.⁴¹

Mind over Muscle: Masculinity and Mental Health in the United Kingdom

Issues of gender are pervasive in discourses of British national identity and mental health in the years leading up to the outbreak of war in 1914. According to Ben Shephard, the centrality of gender conventions to late-Victorian and Edwardian society, particularly its complex masculine codes and ideals, would inform ‘the approach to shell-shock by the British army,

³⁹ Winter, ‘Emotional History’; Showalter, *The Female Malady*, 171.

⁴⁰ Meyer, ‘Separating the Men from the Boys’.

⁴¹ *Ibid*, 5.

medical profession and public.’⁴² The importance placed on masculine character extended from a combination of the Church of England and the Victorian class structure. E. M. Forster famously located the heart of the English national character in the public school system, and it was here that attempts were made to inculcate masculine virtues in youths; where ‘young boys and men were trained for service in the Empire.’⁴³ There was also a desire to disseminate these values among the working classes: ‘State schools mimicked the curricula and focus on games of public schools, and the message of a manly patriotism was further encouraged in youth movements such as the Boy Scouts and Church Lads’ Brigade.’⁴⁴ It is not the case that the working classes were seen to be “unmanly,” only that their version of masculinity was thought to be less refined. As Shephard explains, while these organisations ‘attracted the upwardly aspiring upper-working-class or lower-middle-class young (or their parents), they had less appeal to the ‘lumpen-proletariat’, for whom the attainment of manliness continued to require ‘an elongated “rite of passage” ... through swaggering, brawling and the oblivion induced by either alcohol or violence.’⁴⁵ This difference is among the factors that influenced the British response to the decline in mental health and, later, to shell shock. Christian morality at this time was a fundamental ingredient in the masculine ideal that these organisations tried to impress upon their young charges. John Springhall cites the stated objective of the Boys’ Brigade, ‘The advancement of Christ’s kingdom among Boys and the promotion of habits of Obedience, Reverence, Discipline, Self-respect and all that tends toward true Christian manliness,’ as an indication of this.⁴⁶ These and similar qualities – emotional self-control and restraint (the “stiff upper lip”); physical strength and fitness, bravery and loyalty – form a good

⁴² Shephard, *A War of Nerves*, 20.

⁴³ From his 1920 essay *Notes on the English Character*. E. M. Forster, *Abinger Harvest*, Pocket ed. (London: Edward Arnold & Co., 1940; first published 1936), 3-4; Paul Ward, *Britishness since 1870* (London; New York: Routledge, 2004), 38-9.

⁴⁴ Ward, *Britishness since 1870*, 38-9.

⁴⁵ Shephard, *A War of Nerves*, 19; John Springhall, ‘Building character in the British boy’, in Mangan, J. A. & Walvin, J. (eds.), *Manliness and Morality: Middle-class Masculinity in Britain and America, 1800-1940* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1987), 70.

⁴⁶ Springhall, ‘Building character’, 53.

working definition of the model of public school, Christian masculinity that existed in Britain in the late-Victorian and Edwardian eras.⁴⁷

It would not be an exhaustive definition, however, for there was an unstable relationship between pre-war British society and its broader conception of masculinity. The era of self-control, the historian Sir Michael Howard claims, ‘came in with the Victorians’ with the simultaneous spread of ‘bourgeois Evangelism upward from the middle classes’ that proved to be an antecedent to the aforementioned Christian youth organisations. It was a period marked by significant resistance to the pressures of the Victorian ideal of the composed, staid English gentleman.⁴⁸ As Ledger has argued, ‘the decadent and the dandy undermined the Victorians’ valorization of a robust, muscular brand of British masculinity deemed to be crucial to the maintenance of the British Empire.’⁴⁹ The arrest and subsequent imprisonment of Oscar Wilde for gross indecency in 1895, a great scandal of its time, brought to a close a late-Victorian ‘decadent counterattack’ against traditional masculinity that bore striking resemblance to similar subversive movements: first, the early Victorian ‘cult of male domesticity and sensitivity,’ then again, Shephard suggests, in the first decade of the 20th century.⁵⁰ As these examples demonstrate, masculinity in Britain at this time was in a state of flux that would later come to a head with the disturbing development of male hysteria.

The impact of dominant standards of Christian morality on the public attitude towards mental health can be seen in the example of a disturbance then known as general paralysis of the insane. This mental disorder was socially stigmatised as a ‘moral’ illness despite its biological causes, likely due to its association with syphilis – both ‘a medical problem and a trope for social and cultural degeneration.’⁵¹ Some saw anxieties about this degeneration as exacerbating an existing ‘attack on the fundamental pillars of society – strong nerves, will-power and the clear separation of sexes.’ This led to an impression that the character of the

⁴⁷ See Heather Streets, *Martial Races: The Military, Race and Masculinity in British Imperial Culture, 1857-1914* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), 13; Meyer, ‘Gladder to be going out than afraid’, 196-7.

⁴⁸ Michael Howard qtd. in Shephard, *A War of Nerves*, 19.

⁴⁹ Ledger, ‘The New Woman and the crisis of Victorianism’, 22.

⁵⁰ Shephard, *A War of Nerves*, 19.

⁵¹ *Ibid*, 6; Andrew Smith, *Victorian Demons: Medicine, Masculinity and the Gothic at the fin-de-siècle* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), 95.

British gentleman was weakening; self-control and stiff upper lips giving way to nervousness and introspection.⁵² An increase in cases of neurasthenia was labelled ‘deplorable’ by the conservative magazine *The Spectator* in 1894, its symptoms amounting to little more than ‘timidity bordering on cowardice.’⁵³ An 1887 edition of *The Nineteenth Century* described the prevailing attitude of the more traditionally minded, the medical profession included, towards men of a sensitive nervous disposition:

Even at the present day nervous subjects are generally regarded by “doctors” as most unsatisfactory patients ... If your liver is deranged you have your choice of a score of remedies ... If, on the other hand, it is your nerves that are at fault, your wisest course is to keep silence; for if you should, yielding to a desire for sympathy, reveal your affliction to a friend, he will probably smile upon you in the manner of a superior and inform you “what a foolish thing it is to let your nerves get the better of you.”⁵⁴

The response of the medical profession to this proliferation of “nervousness” and mental disorder in Britain was saturated with class- and gender-based prejudices. Shephard describes a divide that existed between doctors’ approaches towards the diagnosis of patients of different classes. Physicians lived, as he describes it, ‘a Jekyll-and-Hyde life,’ treating their working-class patients, whom they treated for free at teaching hospitals, ‘without much respect and [using] them for research and teaching purposes.’ Conversely, they ‘had to behave quite differently’ towards paying, private patients of their own class.⁵⁵ Gendered biases were also at work in the differentiation of hysteria and neurasthenia. A majority of British doctors, as we have seen was the vogue in medical thought at the time, believed hysteria to have a particular prevalence among women.⁵⁶

Civilian attitudes were reflected in military ones. The ‘profoundly cautious and conservative’ culture of the Royal Army Medical Corps (RAMC) rendered neurology and mental medicine a ‘black hole’ in British military campaigns prior to 1914.⁵⁷ This dominance

⁵² Mosse, ‘Shell-shock as a Social Disease’, 104.

⁵³ Anon., ‘Nerves and Nervousness’, *The Spectator* (6 January 1894), 11.

⁵⁴ Howie, ‘The Nerve-Rest Cure’, 660.

⁵⁵ Shephard, *A War of Nerves*, 8.

⁵⁶ *Ibid*, 9.

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, 24.

of “Old Army” codes of courage, duty, self-sacrifice, and self-control meant that, although ‘no doubt there were men who, from one cause or another, broke down in every campaign ... such breaks down, when they are recorded, are not very sympathetically treated, and unless a man had proved himself of good courage earlier in action, are dismissed as not differing greatly from cowardice.’⁵⁸ A survey by Jones and Wessely, of 6200 soldiers medically discharged following the Second Boer War (1899-1902), ‘found only 11 examples where a psychological cause was diagnosed.’⁵⁹ Yet, as Shephard contends, RAMC reports of the nervous and psychological impact of artillery bombardment in the same conflict (along with the Balkan War of 1912-13) – reports that, predictably, were never followed up – ‘read today as premonitions of shell shock.’⁶⁰

Although, as we will see later, British military psychiatry was beginning to show signs at this time of a shift away from the dismissive and towards the compassionate and understanding, the gendered biases remained. This was especially evident in the divide between officers and regular soldiers, who, as George Robb claims, were split along class lines.⁶¹ ‘Doctors noted,’ Showalter points out,

that war neurosis took different forms in officers and regular soldiers. Symptoms of hysteria appeared primarily among the regular soldiers, while neurasthenic symptoms ... were more common among officers. This extraordinarily tidy distribution of symptoms and diagnoses is consistent with late Victorian moralistic and class-oriented attitudes to hysteria and neurasthenia.⁶²

In the Army, the issues of class and masculinity were inextricably linked. The Christian morality of the public schools was of the same brand as the military code of honour that expected manly courage and emotional self-control.⁶³ Officers, many of whom were taken from these schools, were required to set an example to those under their command and were

⁵⁸ Sir John Fortescue qtd. in *Report of the War Office Committee of Enquiry into “Shell-Shock”*, 9.

⁵⁹ Edgar Jones & Simon Wessely, ‘Psychiatric battle casualties: an intra- and interwar comparison’, *British Journal of Psychiatry*, 178 (2001), 242.

⁶⁰ Shephard, *A War of Nerves*, 24.

⁶¹ George Robb, *British Culture and the First World War* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 84.

⁶² Showalter, *The Female Malady*, 174.

⁶³ Shephard, *A War of Nerves*, 18-9.

therefore under more pressure to conform to these ideals. ‘Military doctors,’ Showalter posits, ‘may have been reluctant to attach the stigmatizing feminine label of hysteria to men of their own social class.’⁶⁴ The shell-shocked soldier was taken to be ‘simple, emotional, unthinking, passive, suggestible, dependent, and weak – very much the same constellation of traits associated with the hysterical woman – while the complex and overworked neurasthenic officer was much closer to an acceptable, even heroic male ideal.’⁶⁵ An amalgam of these two figures may have appeared in the form of what have been called “temporary gentlemen” – one of the approximately 235,000 enlisted men given permanent or temporary commissions during the war in order to expand the rapidly dwindling officer corps.⁶⁶

In terms of the broader context of the national response to shell shock, Shephard has identified José Harris’ perspective on pre-war Britain as ‘a society with two faces’ as central to the understanding of how the nation responded to the influx of shell shock cases during and after the war:

One [face] was masculine and reaching out to the colonies. ‘Imperial visions,’ [Harris] has written, ‘injected a powerful strain of hierarchy, militarism, “frontier mentality,” administrative rationality and masculine civic virtue into British political culture.’ The other face, however, was feminine and inward-looking; ‘domestic political forces were running in quite the opposite direction, towards egalitarianism, “progressivism,” consumerism, popular democracy, feminism and women’s rights.’ The approach to shell-shock by the British Army, medical profession and public would in part be shaped by this division.⁶⁷

It certainly seems that, in Britain, shell shock and the discourses surrounding it have been defined by a series of dichotomies that could be said to reflect this masculine/feminine split. Shephard goes on to detail the conflict that existed at the core of this debate. The RAMC approach to wartime psychiatry, conservative, ‘simple, robust and clear, [was] closely interwoven with the complex masculine codes – of honour, superstition, self-control and

⁶⁴ Showalter, *The Female Malady*, 174.

⁶⁵ *Ibid*, 175.

⁶⁶ ‘Service records of Officers in the British army’, *The National Archives* <www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/pathways/firstworldwar/service_records/sr_officers.htm>.

⁶⁷ José Harris qtd. in Shephard, *A War of Nerves*, 20.

comradeship – on which the Army was based. Mental illness was equated with weakness and lack of self-control,’ and frequently dismissed as malingering or cowardice. The model ‘towards which [Charles] Myers and his colleagues were groping ... [was] more shaded and complex.’ This contrast is borne out in more specific examples that further illustrate the gendered character of the issue. Shephard points to the polarised personalities of the two heads of the RAMC as exemplifying the two sides of the division – the ‘Medical Overlord’ in London, Sir Alfred Keogh, liberal and sensitive to popular opinion, ‘represented some of the more “feminine” sides of Edwardian public culture.’ In France Sir Arthur Sloggett, ‘the classic RAMC type: the rollicking man of action [and] tough-minded administrator’ – the kind of figure whose ‘neatly trimmed moustache ... jaunty walk [and] bantering manner’ one could quite easily imagine inspiring *Blackadder Goes Forth*’s General Melchett – ‘embodied the masculine.’⁶⁸

British military psychiatry was beginning to come into its own during the First World War, as doctors slowly began to appreciate that shell shock and associated ailments ‘were functional disorders related to the stress of combat’ rather than simply the refuge of a malingerer or coward.⁶⁹ This was true to the extent that the medical correspondent for *The Times* noted in 1915 that ‘The wounded soldier’s right to be viewed and treated as an individual with individual qualities of mind is recognized; “wounds of consciousness” receive the same serious attention as wounds of flesh or bone.’⁷⁰ This is a contentious claim, prejudiced by its possibly propagandistic purpose, but it at least proves that more sympathetic attitudes to mental disorder were starting to creep into the public and medical awareness.

Muscle over Mind: Masculinity and Mental Health in the United States

In Britain, as we have seen, the rigid Victorian class system was responsible for the popularisation of a specific brand of masculine ideal. In America’s popular conception of manliness, it seems that class could play little part because, on the other side of the Atlantic, a

⁶⁸ Shephard, *A War of Nerves*, 23–5.

⁶⁹ Jones & Wessely, ‘Psychiatric battle casualties’, 242.

⁷⁰ Anon, ‘The Wounded Mind and its Cure’.

system like Britain's simply did not exist. 'Throughout much of their history,' Glenn C. Altschuler writes, 'Americans boasted that the nation, in contrast to Europe, was relatively free of fixed categories of social class.'⁷¹ Where British schoolboys were often assigned specific expectations of masculinity according to the class into which they were born – the upper-class, Christian public school brand or the diluted, "rite of passage" version inculcated in working-class youths – no such system dictated the fate of their American cousins. This was, of course, the land of opportunity; home of the utopian vision of the American dream, where all men are born free and created equal. In reality, Altschuler notes, status distinctions did exist but 'social class depended far more upon wealth than birth.'⁷² Upward social mobility was an attainable goal for those with the necessary ambition, skill, and work ethic, regardless of the circumstances of their birth:

One can (and many did) exaggerate the amount of geographic and economic mobility, but relative to Europe, the United States *was* the land of opportunity. Abundant resources and land ... and the protection of continental isolation provided reasons for aspiration and expectation. Rags to riches were very rare but possible; poverty to middle-class comfort occurred frequently. The adages of Benjamin Franklin seemed rooted in reality, even for the poor. All could legitimately aspire to the status conferred by wealth.⁷³

John Higham's article 'The Reorientation of American Culture in the 1890s' claims that, in the latter half of the nineteenth century, 'Americans on the whole had submitted docilely enough to the gathering restrictions of a highly industrialised society ... to mask their aggressions behind a thickening façade of gentility.'⁷⁴ The new type of adventurous, rugged masculinity that emerged in late-19th century America as a response to these circumstances originated, he claims, from an institution that was a potent emblem of upward social mobility: the college education.⁷⁵ Higham suggests that a rapidly building craze for outdoor activity and competitive

⁷¹ Glenn C. Altschuler, *Race, Ethnicity, and Class in American Social Thought, 1865-1919* (Arlington Heights: Davidson, 1982), 79.

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ John Higham, 'The Reorientation of American Culture in the 1890s', in Weiss, J. (ed.), *The Origins of Modern Consciousness* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1965), 27.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

sports heralded the arrival of a new masculine ideal that denounced the fading ‘heritage of Puritan piety,’ ‘subordinated mind to muscle,’ and valued ‘ruggedness of nature’ over ‘refinements of culture.’⁷⁶ Not only did this constitute an internal ‘challenge [to] the restraint and decorum of the “Gilded Age,”’ it also represented a counterpoint to Britain. This was an emotive and passionate new brand of masculinity that was, in many ways, the antithesis of Britain’s, which as we know was located largely in Christian restraint and understatement. There were similarities, of course, between American collegiate and British public school ideas of manliness: both placed a certain emphasis on sports and physical fitness, but in the U.S., it was placed squarely at the forefront. As E. Anthony Rotundo explains, primitive aspects of manliness began to dominate:

In the three-quarters of a century after the American Revolution, bourgeois Northerners showed the deepest concern for manhood in its moral, social, and political meaning, while placing a lesser emphasis on the male body. Then, in the second half of the nineteenth century, this relative emphasis began to change ... men of [the period] went a step beyond [the] assertion that a strong body was the foundation for a strong character; they treated physical strength and strength of character as the same thing.⁷⁷

The toxic effects of the separation of men from their primitive origins was at the forefront of American psychiatric thought in the 19th century. If it was in the purity and simplicity of nature and their natural bodies that men thrived, then it was due to its opposite force that they broke down. In classifying neurasthenia as a medical disorder in 1881, the neurologist George Miller Beard defined the rise of modern civilisation and its five key characteristics – ‘steam-power, the periodical press, the telegraph, the sciences, and the mental activity of women’ – as its root cause.⁷⁸ By Beard’s definition it was not a mental illness, but a physical, neurological one, a ‘deficiency or lack of nerve-force.’⁷⁹ As Gail Bederman explains, neurasthenia was ‘a malfunction of bodily physics’ which ‘resulted when a highly evolved person seriously

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 25.

⁷⁷ E. Anthony Rotundo, *American Manhood: Transformations in Masculinity from the Revolution to the Modern Era* (New York: Basic, 1993), 222-3.

⁷⁸ George M. Beard, *American Nervousness: Its Causes and Consequences* (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1881), vi.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

overtaxed his body's finite supply of nerve force.'⁸⁰ For Beard, 'The chief and primary cause of this development and very rapid increase in nervousness is *modern civilisation* ... [it] is the one constant factor without which there can be little or no nervousness.'⁸¹ He also saw the phenomenon as peculiarly American in origin.⁸²

Modern civilisation brought with it, as we know, a new type of warfare. It is curious, as Shephard has observed, that the American reaction to shell shock 'drew hardly at all on their own rich writings in this field.'⁸³ They had dealt with thousands of cases of nostalgia, an example of widespread wartime trauma that might be recognisable as a precursor to shell shock, forty years earlier during what has been described as the first of the modern wars: the American Civil War.⁸⁴ Yet, after entering World War I in 1917, American doctors would largely defer to their British counterparts, more experienced in this new and psychologically fraught theatre, in the matter of treating shell shock patients.⁸⁵ Thomas Salmon, sent to Europe in May 1917 to learn the 'lessons of modern war,' concluded that the treatment of shell shock was 'essentially a problem of psychological medicine.'⁸⁶ There is a disconnect, then, between the popular perception of manliness in America – based in the physical body – which had informed ideas about mental disorder up until this point, and the conception of shell shock as based in the mind.

⁸⁰ Gail Bederman, *Manliness & Civilisation: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago, IL; London: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 85.

⁸¹ Beard, *American Nervousness*, vi.

⁸² He attributed this to 'a number of influences, the chief of which are dryness in the air, extremes of heat and cold, civil and religious liberty, and the great mental activity made necessary and possible in a new and productive country under such climatic conditions.' See *ibid*, vii-viii.

⁸³ Shephard, *A War of Nerves*, 123.

⁸⁴ *Ibid*; Eric Foner, *Give Me Liberty!: An American History*, 2nd ed. (New York; London: W. W. Norton, 2009), 482. Nostalgia, the roots of which can be traced back as far as the 16th century, enjoyed a resurgence when hostilities broke out in 1861. Inflicted with a kind of psychosis born of severe homesickness; 'stress anxiety induced by the trauma of combat,' sufferers were subject to the same accusations of failing manhood as the shell-shocked men on the western front some four decades later: 'to admit that one was homesick was to cast doubt over one's masculinity as well as call into question one's self-discipline and restraint.' See David Anderson, 'Dying of Nostalgia: Homesickness in the Union Army during the Civil War', *Civil War History*, 56:3 (2010), 249, 270. For a detailed history of nostalgia, see George Rosen, 'Nostalgia: a 'forgotten' psychological disorder', *Psychological Medicine*, 5 (1975).

⁸⁵ For a more detailed account of Salmon's war work, see Shephard, *A War of Nerves*, 123-32.

⁸⁶ *Ibid*, 123; Salmon, 'Care and Treatment', 509.

As I will elucidate in the chapters to come, the primary point of departure between British and American masculinity in the period leading up to the outbreak of war is one that has continually informed the two nations' cinematic treatment of shell shock. The British conception of manliness, founded chiefly in mental and emotional control and class hierarchy, is reflected in its reaction to the masculine problem of war neuroses. British cinema, broadly speaking, conforms to this in its modes of representing the shell-shocked men that populate the films that are discussed here. American cinema, in contrast, most frequently recalls the physical and primitive pre-war masculine ideal, free from class prejudice, in basing its own, often more emotive representations not in the mind, but in the body.

In light of the historical and cultural context outlined above, it seems predictable that films that deal with the plight of the shell-shocked soldier and the doctors and psychiatrists that treated him would be universally saturated with the same concerns about the disintegration, rehabilitation, and renegotiation of various versions of masculinity. This will take centre stage, therefore, in the discussions that are to come, and Showalter and Meyer's delineations of feminisation, infantilisation, and the bestial or inhuman as their central line of enquiry. In many of these films, issues of gender and masculinity are themselves the sole focus. In others, it feeds into examinations of other aspects of the disorder. I argue that there are two central, recurrent motifs in which this is most often the case. The first is the critique of military and medical institutions and hierarchies, and their attitudes towards and treatment of traumatised soldiers. The second is shell shock as a symbol of industrialised war; of its profound suffering and senselessness that precipitated a surge of post-war disillusionment and pacifist sentiment. There is, of course, a great deal of cross-pollination, with many films accounting for a combination of several of these themes. They are also cross-cultural, and analyses will therefore look to take into account the national differences between Britain and the United States, delineated above, within this broader framework. It is also important, finally, to provide a concrete definition of the term "shell shock" as it appears in this thesis. It is used, firstly, to mean psychological trauma within the specific context of the First World War. In certain instances, it refers to a specifically defined psychological disorder, a set of medical symptoms

and discourses that are represented on screen. In others, it refers to the symbolic status that it has taken on since 1918, to a more nebulous sense of the personal and national traumas that reverberated from the war experience.

In *The Film in History*, Pierre Sorlin argues that in historical films, history itself ‘is no more than a useful device to speak of the present time.’⁸⁷ The analyses contained here take into account cinematic texts from the broadest of timelines – from the very first celluloid echoes of war neuroses, made whilst the war was still raging, to the present day – that share a subject very specific to its historical context. This thesis will consider these filmic interpretations of shell shock in light of Sorlin’s argument, examining the relationship between content and context: I argue that the appearance of these films correspond to historical periods of marked social consciousness, turbulence, or discovery in one or more of the subject areas – gender constructs, mental health, and military conflict – to which shell shock is inextricably tied, and examine how, in doing so, they often allegorise their present through their representation of the past. Thus, chapters one and six explore the two periods that bookend the century since the outbreak of the First World War: the war itself, during which time propaganda dominated filmic output, and the years since the turn of the twenty-first century, with the war moving back into the public and cinematic consciousness in the build-up to the centenary commemorations. Chapter two examines the social milieu of the interwar era, positioning cinematic shell shock against the concurrent rise of pacifism and the New Woman given rise by the events of 1914-1918, while chapter three looks at the impact of the Second World War on production of films about the First. Chapter four considers the filmic landscape of shell shock in America since 1945, a period dominated by concerns relating to the Cold War. Chapter five explores the same period in British cinema, tracing a timeline of remembrance of the war and the “rediscovery” of psychological trauma towards the end of the century.

The primary aim of this thesis is to improve our comprehension of the films at hand. If, however, as Marnie Hughes-Warrington claims, ours is indeed ‘a world in which films rank second only to photographs as the means by which people claim to connect to the past,’ then

⁸⁷ Sorlin, *The Film in History*, 208.

perhaps this can extend to the emotional and intellectual understanding of one of the most important global events of the modern age.⁸⁸

⁸⁸ Marnie Hughes-Warrington, 'Introduction: History on film: theory, production, reception', in Hughes-Warrington, M. (ed.), *The History on Film Reader* (London; New York: Routledge, 2009), 1.

Propaganda Wars: The Politics of Shell Shock, 1914-1918

Considering the rapidity of the rise of cinema to mainstream popularity in the early 20th century, it was surely only a matter of time before the film medium and politics would begin to intertwine. We can find the roots of propaganda in film form on the home fronts of the Great War. In Britain, the bringing of wartime propaganda to large-scale audiences through the big screen was a troubled process. As Nicholas Reeves reports, the potential of the cinema to push ideological causes was publically recognised by the news media, cinema trade and the wartime administration as early as August 1914, but it would be a full year before the first official film was screened.¹ It would be another year thereafter for its full potential to be realised, signalled by the overwhelming success of *The Battle of the Somme* (1916), the first of the examples analysed in this chapter. Though the vogue for feature-length propaganda started and finished with that film, by the end of the war, 240 official pieces, mostly in short factual form, and 152 official newsreels had been released in British cinemas.² As James Chapman observes, ‘the history was one of initial scepticism at the beginning of the war to grudging acceptance by around 1916, followed by a belated recognition of the value of the cinematograph by the war’s end.’³

It was thanks, in part, to the efforts of British propagandists that the United States was dragged from the relative comfort of its neutrality and into the theatre of war in April of 1917. The War Propaganda Bureau, nicknamed after its London headquarters at Wellington House in Westminster, was established in September 1914. Its creation was in response to Germany’s large-scale foreign propaganda campaign, with an aim ‘to counteract the dissemination by

¹ Nicholas Reeves, ‘Official British War Propaganda’, in Paris (ed.), *The First World War and Popular Cinema*, 27-8. This delay was largely due to the desire to produce ‘real British war films, as distinct from faked war dramas,’ which required location shooting at the front, and the difficulty in securing the necessary co-operation of the initially sceptical War Office to send cameramen to France. See 28-9.

² *Ibid*, 32.

³ Chapman, *War and Film*, 38.

Germany of false news abroad.’⁴ This rather secretive organisation took aim, like the Germans, at foreign nations as far-reaching as Scandinavia and South America, with the United States the vital responsibility of a special dedicated department.⁵ America’s entry into the war represented the success of one of Wellington House’s central objectives. Seeing the ‘counter-productive results’ of Germany’s ‘mistake of bombarding American public opinion with their propaganda of exhortation,’ the British method was rather more subtle and restrained.⁶ It targeted the American societal elite, believing its propaganda material, which ‘took the form of reasoned, almost quasi-academic, explanations of the issues involved,’ would be most effective if allowed to trickle down to the wider public, via this elite group of cultural, economic and political leaders, ‘in their own words and in their own accents.’⁷

President Woodrow Wilson signed Executive Order 2594, establishing the Committee on Public Information (CPI) and along with it the States’ own propaganda program, on April 13, 1917, one week after declaring war.⁸ The President chose journalist George Creel to oversee the committee, with a challenging mandate to rally public support for the country’s involvement in a war raging on the opposite side of the Atlantic Ocean. Historians seem to agree that the film industry, in close alliance with the federal government, was central to the success of the CPI’s campaign.⁹ The committee’s *Official Bulletin* of July 12, 1917 announced the formation of the War Cooperation Committee, consisting of members of the National Association of the Motion Picture Industry (NAMPI), to ‘Bring into Close Cooperation Every Factor of the Industry’ with the CPI’s propaganda effort.¹⁰ Creel ‘pointed out to the committee

⁴ M. L. Sanders, ‘Wellington House and British Propaganda during the First World War’, *The Historical Journal*, 18:1 (1975), 119.

⁵ *Ibid*, 120.

⁶ Philip M. Taylor, *British Propaganda in the Twentieth Century: Selling Democracy* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), 35.

⁷ *Ibid*, 36, 35.

⁸ See Woodrow Wilson, ‘Executive Order 2594 – Creating Committee on Public Information’ (13 April 1917). *The American Presidency Project* <www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=75409>.

⁹ Leslie Midkiff DeBauche, *Reel Patriotism: The Movies and World War I* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1997), 134-5; Ben Singer & Charlie Keil, ‘Introduction: Movies and the 1910s’, in Keil, C. & Singer, B. (eds.), *American Cinema of the 1910s: Themes and Variations* (New Brunswick, NJ; London: Rutgers University Press, 2009), 8.

¹⁰ Anon., ‘Leaders of “Movie” Industry Confer with Officials on War Program for Film World’, *The Official Bulletin* (12 July 1917), 8 <www.babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015020137835;view=1up;seq=462>.

that the motion picture could carry the message of America farther than any printed word, because, as the President said in his letter to ... [NAMPI Chairman William A.] Brady, "it speaks a universal language".¹¹

Broadly speaking, the character and tone of the propaganda films produced by Britain and the United States tended to be very different. Reeves characterises the former's cinematic output as most unlike its print variety: '[British official] films avoided the hysterical and deeply chauvinistic 'propaganda of hate' that was so dominant in the wartime propaganda constructed by the press ... Such propaganda revelled in presenting the Germans as barbaric Huns who routinely mutilated children, raped women and indiscriminately slaughtered all who crossed their path.'¹² More importantly for our purposes, British film propagandists seemed able to resist the temptation to 'indulge in [these] invented atrocity stories,' showing 'remarkable ideological restraint,' where their American counterparts oftentimes could not.¹³ Leslie Midkiff DeBauche, just one critic of the so-called "hate the Hun" films produced in the States, which followed the lead of the British press' aforementioned hate campaigns, has labelled them 'virulent,' while Thomas Doherty has claimed that they 'served to discredit not only the portrayal of war on screen but the whole enterprise of cinematic propaganda.'¹⁴ The tonal landscape of the screen propaganda produced by these two nations is not, of course, as simple as this suggested division, but it does provide a useful introductory context in which to place the discussions contained in this chapter, because, as we will see, dichotomy – between the strong and the weak, the masculine and feminine, the real and the illusory – is one of the defining characteristics of film propaganda's representation of shell shock in this period. This chapter will explore the representations of the psychological impact of war in a selection of

Among the WCC's membership was D. W. Griffith, whose *Hearts of the World* is discussed here later. The names of producers Samuel Goldwyn (then Samuel Goldfish), William Fox and Louis B. Meyer also stand out among a list of representatives from many of the major Hollywood studios.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Reeves, 'Official British War Propaganda', 32.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Leslie Midkiff DeBauche, 'Film in the First World War', in Venzon, A. C. (ed.), *The United States in the First World War: An Encyclopedia* (New York; London: Garland Publishing, 1995), 223; Thomas Doherty, *Projections of War: Hollywood, American Culture, and World War II*, Rev. ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 91.

these films and the ways in which war neuroses was used as a tool to push their ideological agendas.

Wartime propaganda provides us with some of the earliest examples of film representations of shell shock. These examples are, however, few and far between for two reasons. Firstly, the nature of the footage, shot with rudimentary early cameras and, of course, lacking sound, is not entirely conducive to the portrayal of a psychological ailment unless the condition's external symptoms are particularly pronounced. This is especially true of realist documentaries like *The Battle of the Somme*, which did not have the luxury of a narrative to complement their visual storytelling. Perhaps more significantly, the stigma associated with shell shock often precluded its portrayal to the public, especially in association with a nation's own troops, being antithetical to the images of strong and heroic guardians that propagandists wanted to cultivate in the public psyche. The discussions in this chapter cover three film examples in which shell shock can be seen to play a significant role.¹⁵ They are a good indication of the types of propaganda produced, and where it was present, how shell shock was represented. *The Battle of the Somme* is the most well-known and probably finest example of Britain's official documentary output; Dr. Arthur Hurst's *War Neuroses* (1917) is the only example of a factual film made during the war that takes shell shock as its main subject; and D. W. Griffith's *Hearts of the World* (1918) is an American-made example of how psychological trauma was incorporated into a war narrative.

The Battle of the Somme, an official film commissioned by the Topical Committee for War Films with support from the War Office, depicts British and German soldiers on the Western Front in the lead up to and early stages of the eponymous battle in the latter half of 1916. Shot by two official cinematographers, Geoffrey Malins and John McDowell, it makes no attempt to hide its aim to serve the interests of the war effort, galvanise public support and promote peace by exhibiting the realities of trench warfare. 'Its cause and purpose is that every one of us at

¹⁵ Britain and the United States produced hundreds of propaganda films and newsreels in an effort to muster public support and raise morale during the Great War. A thorough survey of the incidence of portrayals of shell shock in the surviving material would no doubt be valuable, but would require a separate, dedicated study.

home, and those abroad, shall see what our men at the front are doing and suffering for us; and how their achievements have been made possible by the sacrifices made at home. Be up and doing also!,' reads a quote attributed to the then-Secretary of State for War (and later wartime Prime Minister) David Lloyd George in an August 1916 *Illustrated London News* article.¹⁶ The film was an enormous success both in terms of box office – if measured in terms of the percentage of the population to see it, it was, and remains, the most successful British film of all time¹⁷ – and in its propagandistic goals. The 'radical effect' it had on the public perception of the war proved the value of and set a precedent in the use of the film medium as propaganda.¹⁸ Audiences were convinced of its realism and roused by the images they saw. *The Daily Telegraph* labelled it '[t]he war in all its grim, murderous reality' while *The Times* declared there to be '[n]othing more stirring than the sight of infantry rushing over the parapet to attack' (Figure 1). The *Times* refers here to arguably the most famous scene in the film, which depicts a group of soldiers going "over the top." Here is Roger Smither on the range of reactions to the sequence:

[They] encompassed shock ('Oh God, they're dead!' cried a woman in the audience), and outrage ('I beg leave respectfully to enter a protest against an entertainment which wounds the heart and violates the very sanctity of bereavement', wrote the Dean of Durham) but the most common was a kind of stunned but approving empathy. The author Rider Haggard wrote in his diary: "... it does give a wonderful idea of the fighting... The most impressive [picture] to my mind is that of a regiment scrambling out of a trench to charge and of the one man who slides back shot dead."¹⁹

It is testament to the quality of their construction that this scene, and the film as a whole, would be so effective. It has been argued that 'one of the reasons for the success of the film was its genuine appearance.'²⁰ However, Smither's analysis has found that it was likely just that – an

¹⁶ Anon., "An Epic of Self-Sacrifice and Gallantry": British War Films., *Illustrated London News* (26 August 1916).

¹⁷ Lawrence Napper, *The Great War in Popular British Cinema of the 1920s: Before Journey's End* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 3-4.

¹⁸ S. D. Badsey, 'Battle of the Somme: British war-propaganda', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, 3:2 (1983), 100.

¹⁹ Roger Smither, "A Wonderful Idea of the Fighting": the question of fakes in "The Battle of the Somme", *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, 13:2 (1993), 149.

²⁰ Alastair H. Fraser, Andrew Robertshaw & Steve Roberts, *Ghosts on the Somme: Filming the Battle, June-July 1916* (Barnsley: Pen & Sword Military, 2009), 163.



Fig. 1. Advertisement for *The Battle of the Somme* in *The Observer* (27 August 1916), featuring the comments from *The Times* and *The Daily Telegraph*.

appearance – with a significant likelihood that the “over the top” sequence was reconstructed by Malins. I am not interested in interrogating whether or not each scene is explicitly a reconstruction – this has already been covered more than adequately in the work of Smither and others²¹ – but this revelation does, of course, throw the authenticity of the rest of the film into question, and, more significantly, forces the contemporary viewer to think about it as a representation, rather than an unbiased record, of the events.²² Recent scholarship on the documentary film has emphasised its links to narrative cinema, with Bill Nichols going as far as to call such films ‘fictions with plots, characters, situations, and events like any other ... Like the constructed realities of fiction, this reality, too, must be scrutinised and debated as part of the domain of signification and ideology.’²³ These documentaries are presented (and received,

²¹ See Fraser, Robertshaw & Roberts, *Ghosts on the Somme*, 163-171; Smither, ‘A Wonderful Idea of the Fighting’.

²² Malins maintained, in his 1920 autobiography, that it was real battle footage, but a combination of Smither’s analysis of the scene and direct contradictory evidence provides a robust case against his claim. See Lieut. Geoffrey H. Malins & Low Warren (ed.), *How I Filmed the War: A Record of the Extraordinary Experiences of the Man Who Filmed the Great Somme Battles etc.* (London: Herbert Jenkins, 1920), 162-64; Smither, ‘A Wonderful Idea of the Fighting’, 149-50.

²³ Bill Nichols, *Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1991), 107. For an overview of the arguments on this particular aspect of nonfiction filmmaking, see Elizabeth Marquis, ‘Just Act Naturally’: *A Poetics of Documentary Performance*, PhD thesis, University of Toronto (2009), 5-11.

for the most part) as objective but inevitably made subjective by their ideological purpose, and the “constructedness” and inherently manipulative nature of the shooting and editing process. To lift the veil on these films’ veneer of objectivity, and discover how they have represented and even employed shell shock, they must be analysed, as a particular kind of narrative, with Nichols’ words in mind.

Shell shock is consigned somewhat to the margins of *The Battle of the Somme*, evident to any significant degree in just one brief sequence of its 77-minute running time. From it, however, we can draw a fair amount of subtext. It begins with an intertitle: “British wounded and nerve-shattered German prisoners arriving. Officers giving drink, and Tommies offering cigarettes to German prisoners.” We see two British soldiers pass the camera, limping, held up by their comrades. Then more Tommies, shepherding battle-worn German prisoners, some of



Fig. 2. British Tommies dominate their German captors in *The Battle of the Somme*.

whom seem disoriented. In the next frame (Figure 2) we see a seated huddle of prisoners, surrounded by an audience of their captors, who offer them water and cigarettes.

From the start of the scene, then, the film contrasts the psychological wellbeing of the two groups of soldiers. It is made very clear – through the language used in the intertitle and the choice of footage – that the British are physically wounded, and their enemies “nerve

shattered” – mentally wounded. Here, the filmmakers perpetuate and exploit the stigma attached to nervous weakness at this time, explored in this thesis’ introduction, to disparage the psychological fortitude of the German forces. They are painted as fragile and weak – qualities that could be read both as feminising and infantilising. But this in itself was not enough – it was necessary, also, to build a public image of the ordinary British Tommy that stood in opposition to this portrayal of their German counterparts: one of mental strength, generosity, nobility, righteousness, and mercifulness. This is achieved by a combination of several aspects of the sequence. Firstly, the film is unwilling to portray British soldiers as mentally wounded, but physical wounds are depicted as honourable, as well as an opportunity to display a sense of camaraderie between the men (the men carrying their injured brothers-in-arms). In the very cinematic composition illustrated in figure 2, an obvious power relationship is established between the fragmented line of exhausted German prisoners, seated and low in the frame, dominated by the solid and cohesive wall of standing British. The supposed moral superiority and generous, merciful character of the latter is emphasised by their giving of drinks and cigarettes to their captives. As is noted by the Imperial War Museum’s viewing guide for the film, these actions are ‘rather obviously in response to suggestions from the camera position.’²⁴ An alternative interpretation might reasonably suggest that these scenes are calculated not to denigrate the German soldiers but to vilify war itself as part of an anti-war message. As Reeves puts it, ‘[a]gain and again the film stresses the common humanity of men engaged in bitter and bloody war ... Of course the German prisoners are “nerve-shattered”, but the title is stressing their helplessness when so much other propaganda stressed their aggression and barbarity.’²⁵

²⁴ Imperial War Museum, *The Battle of the Somme – Viewing Guide* (London, 2008), 20 <iwm.org.uk/upload/package/100/Somme%20DVD/documents/viewing_guide.pdf>.

²⁵ Nicholas Reeves, *Official British Film Propaganda During the First World War* (London: Croom Helm, 1986), 160.

Although it was made on behalf of the British government, and with its co-operation, *Hearts of the World* is difficult to consider “British” in any other sense of the word.²⁶ It was directed by D. W. Griffith, the pioneering mind responsible for *The Birth of a Nation* (1915) and arguably the most important American filmmaker of the silent era, drawing ‘substantially on [his] access to the unique facilities of Hollywood’ and aimed squarely at influencing the American public’s stance on the war.²⁷ It is one of only two official propaganda films made during the war with any association with Britain that had a clear fictional narrative, the other being the ill-fated *The National Film*, the only print of which was destroyed soon after the war was over.²⁸

It is also rather American in character. *Hearts of the World* is a sensationalist melodrama, the story of a romance between a young American (Robert Harron, whose character is known only as the Boy) and his love interest (the Girl, Lillian Gish) in a sleepy French village. Their fledgling relationship is torn apart when war breaks out, and the Boy goes to fight on the side of the French. Despite, as Reeves notes, the only available version of the film being a shortened one with much of the most anti-German content removed, the sentiment remains in the way in which the film portrays its German characters.²⁹ Among the scenes that remain are one in which a German officer whips the Girl when she cannot lift a heavy basket (an image that adorns the film’s poster [Figure 3]), and another in which she suffers an attempted rape at the hands of the same. ‘The film inflamed audiences,’ Gish would later recall. ‘Its depiction of German brutality bordered on the absurd. Whenever a German came near me, he beat me or kicked me.’³⁰ The emotionality of the melodrama, and the exaggeration of the

²⁶ There is a fascinating and much-debated story behind the making of *Hearts of the World* and Griffith’s ‘mysterious’ trips to England in 1917. For a detailed account see Russell Merritt, ‘D. W. Griffith Directs the Great War: The Making of *Hearts of the World*’, *Quarterly Review of Film Studies*, 6:1 (1981); Reeves, *Official British Film Propaganda*, 119-25.

²⁷ Reeves, *Official British Film Propaganda*, 212.

²⁸ *Ibid*, 212. The first print of *The National Film*, completed in June 1918, fell victim to a fire before it could be screened. A second version was finished just as the war was coming to a close; it was decided, due to its anti-German content, that it was unsuitable for post-war exhibition and subsequently destroyed. See 126; Nicholas Reeves, ‘Film Propaganda and its Audience: The Example of Britain’s Official Films during the First World War’, *Journal of Contemporary History*, 18:3 (1983), 465.

²⁹ Reeves, *Official British Film Propaganda*, 212.

³⁰ Lillian Gish qtd. in Joel Bleifuss, ‘Imagining War’, *focusfeatures.com* (12 December 2007) <www.focusfeatures.com/article/imagining_war/print>.

depiction of the Germans as violent and barbaric, does not necessarily mark the film as American, *per se* – but it does demonstrate a glaring lack of the restraint that characterises much of Britain's output.

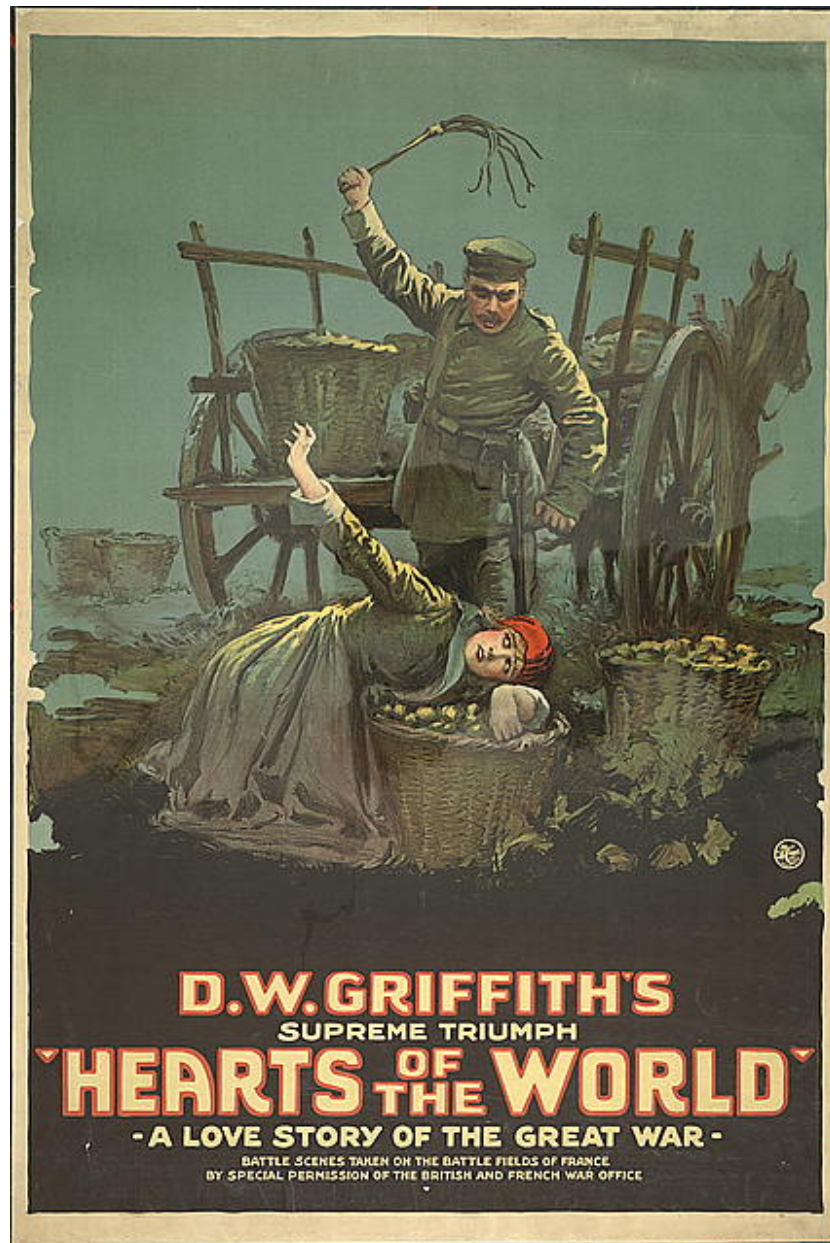


Fig. 3. Hate the Hun: the malicious German officer and downtrodden Girl in a promotional poster for *Hearts of the World*.

Griffith's film, however, parallels *The Battle of the Somme* in the way it puts shell shock to ideological use. In the latter, as we have seen, the mental trauma caused by the war – and its gendered undertones – is used to distinguish two groups of male soldiers. In the former, we see the genders themselves dichotomised according to their response to war's psychological

pressures. Once he has established the idyll of the French village – with the couple’s whirlwind courtship at its heart – Griffith quite literally destroys it. The passage depicting the German shelling of the village – which is referred to as the day the couple set for their wedding day – is the film’s visual and narrative centrepiece. Griffith hangs the potential of the war to shatter the mind over his characters and observes their responses. He alludes to the fighting – shell bombardment, more specifically – as an attack on the “soul” in two intertitles. Together they illustrate what was then a typically binary view of the genders, seen through the lens, again, of shell shock. “The bombardment trying the souls of men,” announces the first, towards the start of the barrage – just after the Boy has joined the army at the front. We see the German forces line up for an assault as shells fall on the French trenches around them. Griffith shows us their charge and the initial meeting of the two forces in a long shot before moving into a tighter shot of the Boy as he wages close combat with a German soldier, beating him with the butt-end of his rifle then stabbing another with his bayonet before moving onto the next fight. This one is more equal: the pair lock bayonets and the Boy’s adversary is seen in an extreme low-angle close-up, dominant in the frame and over the Boy. Another close-up, the Boy this time from a high angle, in the shadow of his foe but courageous and defiant in expression and body language. The German lunges, the Boy dodges and our hero wins out, defeating several more assailants before a title signals the French retreat. Griffith wants us to witness the Boy’s bravery and heroism here, as a reminder of his physical and mental resistance to this sustained attack on his “soul.” He does not cower in the face of the enemy or yield to the mental pressures of warfare. This view is only strengthened when we remember that he is a foreigner that made, readily, the honourable choice to fight for a country not of his birth, but in which he has made his home.

Reeves reads this as the film’s recognition of the way in which war brutalises and corrupts the innocent, noting that, ‘at least in battle, the boy is ultimately portrayed as quite as violent and aggressive as his German counterparts.’³¹ This is a valid point, and certainly consistent with other examples within the film that portray a similar sentiment, of war and its

³¹ Reeves, *Official British Film Propaganda*, 214.

horrors as the true enemy. This must not be overstated, however. Even though it is true of the surviving print that the film ‘does not over-indulge anti-German hysteria,’ it is a 60% complete version from which, Reeves admits, ‘the most anti-German footage has been removed,’ and which may not represent its intended character.³² Furthermore, as Reeves says, the Boy’s violence occurs only in battle, when under threat, and in non-battle scenes he is depicted as kind and gentle. The two major scenes of German cruelty – the whipping of the Girl and her attempted rape – portray barbarity for its own sake, whereas the Boy’s can easily be interpreted as necessary in the defence of his own and others’ lives.

The second of the aforementioned titles appears later in the shelling sequence, as the town lies in ruins: “The mind of the simple soul broken by shell and terror – sweet bells jangled, out of tune.” This scene, perhaps predictably, focusses on the Girl. Where the Boy demonstrates mental resilience to the incoming enemy, it has mentally broken her. The title clearly speaks to a traditional view of the genders that associates the masculine with the strong, and the feminine with the “sweet,” “simple,” and weak. This extends to her hysterical reaction to the situation – her “sweet bells jangled, out of tune” of course a rather obvious euphemism for her compromised mental state. As she wanders through the decimated streets of her village, clutching her wedding dress, the destruction becomes a metaphor for her mind. Soon after, we are reminded that this is taking place on the day originally set for the couple’s wedding. Later, she walks a “befogged and dizzy path” – another intertitle – that Griffith reflects visually. She is now wearing the dress over her head as a veil, searching desperately and helplessly for her groom; in the combination the strongly feminine iconography of the bridal attire and the eerie atmosphere of the foggy landscape she cuts a decidedly spectral figure (Figure 4). This is coupled with the subtext of the dress – powerful in its patriarchal undertones and association with the subjugation of the female sex to the male – as the film draws a parallel between shell shock and death. Without the male – the war has taken him – she is no better than dead and little more than a ghost.

³² *Ibid.*



Fig. 4. Lillian Gish's Girl as the ghostly bride searching the decimated landscape for her fiancé.

Griffith uses the shell bombardment to test the mental fortitude of his two central characters, and we witness two very different reactions that seem to be prescribed according to the perceived characteristics of their genders. In *Hearts of the World*, shell shock is the domain of the female and not, as it is in *The Battle of the Somme*, of the feminised male. How does this work in terms of the film's purpose, as propaganda? In one way, the theme of war's psychological pressures is just another cog in the film's anti-war machinery. Its overarching aim to show, in the film's words, "another side to war" besides "brass bands and clanging sabres" encompasses the depiction of various horrors – the death of the Boy's mother, who must be buried by her young sons; the mistreatment of the Girl – with shell shock among them. There are other subtexts at work, however, in its representation of gender. Knowing the protagonists only as the Boy and Girl – as symbols of their genders rather than individual characters – suggests a universality of the love that conquers all evil. Yet it also draws a very clear dividing line between them. With the labelling of shell shock as a female malady, and the Girl's capitulation in reaction to the stresses of war, the responsibility – and glory – of achieving victory is placed in the hands of the mentally resilient and heroic male. Both are used to the film's advantage – a two-pronged approach that attempts to elicit in its audience sympathy for

and anger on behalf of the feminine victim, and inculcate a sense of gallantry and determination through witnessing the deeds of the masculine hero.

Backed by a Medical Research Committee grant and with the Pathé Motion Picture Company on board in a production capacity, the British physician Major (later Sir) Arthur Frederick Hurst began filming shell shock patients undergoing treatment at the Royal Victoria Hospital, Netley and Seale Hayne, Devon, in 1917.³³ He seemed to be inspired by the success of *The Battle of the Somme* and the medical films of French Army neurologists, and the fruits of his labour was *War Neuroses*, an unusual – perhaps unique – example of wartime film propaganda and a central text in shell shock's cinematic canon.³⁴ How can a film that does not explicitly aim to promote the war effort, and was not shown to the public, which on its surface contains nothing more than a series of static shots of various patients' hysterical symptoms and evidence of their recoveries, interspersed with detached, descriptive title cards, be considered propagandistic? The answer to this question depends on bringing the promotion of personal, as well as national, causes and ideologies into the definition of "propaganda," and partially lies in the circumstances surrounding its production and its charismatic creator.

At first glance, *War Neuroses* seems to come down on the former side of the thin line between actuality and documentary. Certainly, this is the impression the filmmakers appear to want to give. The film broadly follows a repetitive structure in which a title card describing a patient's symptoms is displayed, followed by a shot of said patient demonstrating these symptoms, then another intertitle describing the circumstances of his recovery, and finally a scene portraying this recovery before moving to the next patient. For example, the first patient shown is a Private Meek, age 23, whose title reveals that in February of 1917 he is suffering from "complete retrograde amnesia, hysterical paralysis, contractures, mutism and universal anaesthesia," dating from a year beforehand. We see a clip of Meek, sat in a wheelchair, exhibiting these symptoms, along with the "efforts to overcome the rigidity of his ankles." Then,

³³ Edgar Jones, 'War Neuroses and Arthur Hurst: A Pioneering Medical Film about the Treatment of Psychiatric Battle Casualties', *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences*, 67:3 (2011), 1.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

another intertitle reports his “sudden recovery of memory” in November of 1917 “with gradual recovery of body functions. June, 1918, teaching basket-making – his peacetime job.” Another clip follows, demonstrating this. Hurst’s film was not intended for theatrical release, ‘but was shown for training and research and to convince military doctors and commanders that shell shock was a treatable disorder.’³⁵ This is reflected in its outwardly academic character and factual language. However, it does not take too critical an eye for its secrets to begin to unravel. In reading *War Neuroses*, we might recall Nichols’ argument that all documentaries should be scrutinised for how their reality is constructed in much the same way as fiction films. For a film with such an innocent appearance of actuality, it might in fact be the most fraught with ideological agenda and constructed reality of any of the films in this chapter.

The film makes grand claims for the effectiveness of Hurst’s treatments. Intertitles emphasise, matter-of-factly, the great speed with which patients were cured, declaring successes after as little as an hour or 30 minutes of therapy. The film’s editing, which moves proceedings swiftly from symptoms to proof of cure, also helps to create this impression. The ‘narrative of cure’ – as Elizabeth Cowie puts it – that is presented begins in the Hospital setting, where wheelchairs, nurses, and hospital beds naturally dominate scenes of physical pain and mental anguish.³⁶ Most of these pre-treatment images are relatively mild and straightforward in character, but one in particular – which depicts an unnamed patient suffering from ‘Hysterical pseudo-pseudohypertrophic muscular paralysis’ – is striking in its almost horrific theatricality. While the man’s symptoms – an irregular, stumbling gait and contorted limbs – undoubtedly lend themselves to this, the choice of a stark white background and the man’s nakedness besides a garment resembling a loincloth combine with his symptoms to imbue him with an animalistic, inhuman appearance. It imposes on the scene a decidedly uncanny quality (Figure 5). It should be noted that these images are consistent with the ‘scientific pictorial convention’ of the time, established in the European clinics of, for example, Max Nonne and

³⁵ *Ibid*, 2.

³⁶ Elizabeth Cowie, *Recording Reality, Desiring the Real* (Minneapolis; London: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), 124.



Fig. 5. Theatre of Hysteria: Hurst's unnamed muscular paralysis patient. Netley Hospital, 1917.

Clovis Vincent.³⁷ Like Hurst, however, these physicians have been described as great self-publicists, and their films followed similar before-and-after procedure while claiming to 'treat difficult cases quickly.'³⁸ Hurst, Shephard observes, 'had always had a strong theatrical side to his nature, a flashiness some colleagues found unsound; one pupil remembered him as "a great showman".'³⁹ Indeed, it could be argued that his use of film was a natural extension of the theatrical and highly visual psychiatric practices of the previous century, led by Jean-Martin Charcot at the Salpêtrière Asylum in Paris, and his *Iconographie photographique*.⁴⁰

This showmanship and aptitude for visual storytelling continues to evidence itself. Pre-treatment scenes serve as an acute contrast to the post-therapy images that follow them, and Hurst is careful in choosing settings and contexts that maximise this distinction. Most often, they are pastoral in nature, taking advantage of Seale Hayne's rural locale, and depict convalescent patients at work – basket weaving or tending chickens, for instance. Remarkable visual transformations, then, to match his patients' equally remarkable clinical ones. Peaceful images of occupational therapy emphasise not only the effectiveness of the cure, but also that

³⁷ Jones, 'War Neuroses and Arthur Hurst', 15.

³⁸ *Ibid*, 14-15.

³⁹ Shephard, *A War of Nerves*, 79.

⁴⁰ See Rhona Justice-Malloy, 'Charcot and the Theatre of Hysteria', *Journal of Popular Culture*, 28:4 (1995).

the rehabilitated men are fit to return as a functional member of society. The film takes this a step further, suggesting that they might even be capable of returning to duty. Some of the “after” clips show the men in military garb, and one late sequence shows a group, dressed uniformly (albeit not in army uniform), performing a military-like drill. Hurst’s theatrical proclivities are at their most evident in the film’s finale, a battle re-enactment he calls “The Battle of Seale Hayne,” which is ‘striking for its successful filmic realism.’⁴¹ In demonstrating that the men under his care can return, symbolically, to the site of their trauma, he makes a powerful case for the success of his methods. ‘The re-enactment is an enactment of their cure,’ as Cowie puts it, ‘signifying the successful abreaction of the men’s symptoms of trauma.’⁴²

Edgar Jones describes the nature of the treatment methods that brought Hurst and his colleagues such seemingly miraculous results. His report highlights the role of subterfuge in Hurst’s therapies, as in this example: ‘By his own admission, Hurst practiced deliberate deception as an aid to treatment. Three soldiers with functional deafness were told that an “operation” would restore their hearing and they were anesthetized, with small superficial cuts made behind the ear, and a loud noise made during the course of the fake procedure, to demonstrate its success.’⁴³ Jones also notes that the act of filming itself played a part here, with a celluloid record of recovery providing for the patients ‘a tangible record of change’ and working ‘to reinforce the power of suggestion.’⁴⁴ The film may have deceived patients, then, but did this extend to its audience?

Hurst was often vague about the details of the treatment regime at Seale Hayne.⁴⁵ Suspicions regarding authenticity naturally begin to arise when we consider that *War Neuroses* contains very little in the way of actual footage of treatment taking place, instead skipping directly from pre- to post-cure scenes. This seems irregular given the fact that the film was supposedly intended only for medical education purposes. Jones advances the argument that

⁴¹ Cowie, *Recording Reality*, 128.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ Jones, ‘*War Neuroses* and Arthur Hurst’, 19. It should be noted that at this time, this kind of deceptive treatment was not widely considered unethical, on the basis that the ends justified the means. Hurst was also not alone in incorporating these techniques. See 20.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 19.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 18-19.

this could have been down to a lack of any way for Hurst to record the conversation involved in talking therapy, but it is a weak one – he did, after all, have intertitles at his disposal.⁴⁶ Several scholars have drawn attention to the film's presentation of the case of a Sergeant Bisset as evidence of its constructedness.⁴⁷ Hurst claimed to have filmed him between September and November 1917, but the evidence of the clip – 'the background, the column of smoke from the chimney, and the position of the nurses' – suggests that it was shot in a single day, and that Bisset's symptoms were re-enacted – and possibly exaggerated – for the camera.⁴⁸

The film – augmented by similarly extraordinary claims made in articles published by Hurst and his colleagues⁴⁹ – achieved some measure of success in its aims. News of the revolutionary new remedies reached, for example, as far as New Zealand, where the *Nelson Evening Mail* reported 'remarkable developments' in England: 'long-standing and apparently hopeless cases ... have been cured in a few days – sometimes in a few minutes.'⁵⁰ *War Neuroses*, Jones argues, 'exercised a lasting impact – not only on representations of shell shock, but also raising expectations about the outcomes of treatment. The film appeared to provide conclusive evidence that Hurst's interventions worked.'⁵¹ Its influence stretched to the outbreak of the Second World War, when doctors suggested it be revived ahead of an expected deluge of psychiatric casualties.⁵² It was also controversial, however, even in its own time. Several of Hurst's peers were sceptical of its claims of effectiveness and longevity. Among them was Charles Myers, who 'thought that Hurst's team of doctors lacked clinical understanding.'⁵³ Myers 'doubted whether a "quick showy cure" of the symptoms was enough,' writes Shephard,

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁴⁷ Mariana Moscovich, Danny Estupinan, Muhammad Qureshi & Michael S. Okun, 'Shell shock: Psychogenic gait and other movement disorders – A film review', *Tremor and Other Hyperkinetic Movements*, 3 (2013), 3-5; Jones, 'War Neuroses and Arthur Hurst', 20.

⁴⁸ Moscovich et al., 'Psychogenic gait', 3-5.

⁴⁹ In one *Lancet* article, for instance, Hurst and his colleague J. L. M. Symns profess that they are 'disappointed if complete recovery does not occur within 24 h of commencing treatment, even in cases which have been in other hospitals for over a year.' A. F. Hurst & J. L. M. Symns, 'The Rapid Cure of Hysterical Symptoms in Soldiers', *The Lancet*, 192:4953 (1918), 139.

⁵⁰ Anon., "'Shell Shock". Remarkable Cures Effected, New Method of Treatment', *Nelson Evening Mail* (20 December 1918) <www.paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/NEM19181220.2.40>.

⁵¹ Edgar Jones, 'Filming trauma', *The Psychologist* (May 2015), 425.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ *Ibid.*

and ‘there was also muttering about relapses, cynics suggesting that many of Hurst’s patients began to decline as soon as they left his charismatic presence and had usually developed new symptoms by the time the train away from Seale Hayne had reached Salisbury.’⁵⁴ John Tippet would recall in 1939 that he had ‘worked in four different “shell-shock” hospitals, and relapsed Seale Hayne patients were admitted to all of them, and were generally found to have no insight into their condition.’⁵⁵

Like both *The Battle of the Somme* and *Hearts of the World*, dichotomy is at the heart of *War Neuroses*. The film intersects two of the major ways, described by Tom Gunning, in which cinematic realism has been understood. Superficially, it presents a window into the reality of a world occupied by the soldiers and psychiatrists at a military shell shock hospital, part of ‘a basis for evidentiary status for films as historical [and, in this case, medical] documents.’⁵⁶ In some ways this holds true, and as the only significant visual record of shell shock patients filmed during the war it is valuable regardless. On closer inspection, however, the constructedness of this reality becomes apparent, and in its practices of subterfuge, exaggeration, and exclusion Hurst’s film becomes more an example of why cinematic realism might have been ‘denounced as a major ploy in ideological indoctrination.’⁵⁷ It is in these incompatible qualities – what is presented by the deceptive façade and the intended effects of its concealed motives – that we find its dichotomy. These propagandistic intentions were twofold. Firstly, Hurst wanted to convince his fellow physicians and the military powers that shell shock was not only treatable, but quite easily and rapidly so: a propaganda for psychiatric research and understanding. But he also saw an opportunity for self-promotion and, having become ‘alert to the wider appeal of the motion picture,’ to use the film as a kind of personal propaganda; to ‘position himself in the post-war medical hierarchy.’⁵⁸

⁵⁴ Shephard, *A War of Nerves*, 80.

⁵⁵ John A. Tippet, ‘Psychological Casualties in War’, *The British Medical Journal*, 2:4109 (1939), 742.

⁵⁶ Tom Gunning, ‘Moving Away from the Index: Cinema and the Impression of Reality’, *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies*, 18:1 (2007), 29.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ Jones, ‘*War Neuroses* and Arthur Hurst’, 1.

British and American production of propaganda films naturally petered out as the war itself drew to a close in November 1918. The four years, three months and two weeks of attrition and gruelling conflict had planted the seeds for a cinematic form that would later thrive in the hands of the Nazi Party before and during the Second World War, and in service of many and varied political causes thereafter.⁵⁹ Depictions of shell shock are unsurprisingly scant in films made whilst the war was still raging due to the stigma of weakness and emasculation surrounding the disorder. Where its presence *is* felt, as in the films discussed in this chapter, it is swiftly put to use in setting soldiers apart from their weaker enemies, building up images of heroic masculinity or, uniquely, promoting the skills – and career – of an ambitious and charismatic doctor. It is only in the post-war years, as the memory of the war begins to saturate its filmic representations, that shell shock gradually begins to play a part worthy of the status it has assumed as one of the icons of the First World War.

⁵⁹ The most exceptional of these would become celebrated works of film art in their own right, most notoriously Leni Riefenstahl's Nazi propaganda film *Triumph of the Will* (1935).

Pacifism and the New Woman in the Interwar Years

As the immediate experience of the First World War began to fade into memory, the character of the cultural representations of its mental scars began to evolve. Any responsibility or sense of obligation that might have been felt by British and American filmmakers to support the war effort, as many did with works like those discussed in the previous chapter, gradually disappeared after the allied victory. Alan Burton has observed that, in Britain, there was a residual sense of celebration and glorification in the immediate aftermath of victory – films such as *Comradeship* (Maurice Elvey, 1919), ‘a traditional tale of a British soldier doing his duty,’ and the British Instructional Films productions of the 1920s ‘typically voiced little criticism’ and ‘celebrated British military acumen’ – but the backlash against this lingering mode was swift.¹ Interwar cinema soon began, in many instances, to present aspects of the psychological trauma of the conflict with greater realism, candour, refinement, and understanding that seemed to echo a broader shift away from the ‘endorsement and enthusiasm’ of the war years and towards filmic representations in which the ‘Great War in retrospect appeared to be first and foremost senseless.’² Films like Sinclair Hill’s *The Guns of Loos* (1928), Walter Summers’ *Suspense* (1930), *Tell England* (Anthony Asquith & Geoffrey Barkas, 1931), *The Big Parade* (King Vidor, 1925), Raoul Walsh’s *What Price Glory?* (1926), and both versions of *The Dawn Patrol* (Howard Hawks, 1930; Edmund Goulding, 1938) were part of the nascent formation of what Jay Winter has called the ‘modern memory’ of the conflict, ‘the creation of a new language of truth-telling about war’ that was also embraced by

¹ Alan Burton, ‘Death or glory?: The Great War in British film’, in Monk, C. & Sargeant, A. (eds.), *British Historical Cinema* (London; New York: Routledge, 2002), 33. Among the BIF’s output were a number of reconstructions of major World War I battles, including, as Burton notes, *The Battle of Jutland* (1921), *Ypres* (1925), *Mons* (1926), and *The Battle of Coronel and Falkland Islands* (1927). Burton also expands here on the protests of pacifist groups against pro-war cinema in the 1920s.

² Ranier Rother, ‘The Experience of the First World War and the German Film’, trans. Susan Anna Gunther, in Paris (ed.), *The First World War and Popular Cinema*, 226.

modernist poetry, prose and other visual arts in search of ‘an appropriate language of loss.’³ It is natural to assume that this would reflect similar developments in post-war society and, indeed, the eruption of shell shock into the public and medical consciousness was a boon for mental health awareness and treatment. In 1917’s *Shell Shock and Its Lessons*, G. Elliot Smith and T. H. Pear asked whether the advances already made towards ‘a rational and humane method of caring for and treating mental disorder’ during the war would continue in its aftermath.⁴ Their hopes, Ben Shephard asserts, ‘were by and large fulfilled’:

In the decades after the war, great changes did come about. By 1939 there were 187 outpatient clinics in Britain treating psychological problems, a solid core of doctors applying wartime experience of psychotherapy to civilian problems and a torrent of publications popularising the “new” psychology. Younger doctors came to recognise the need for psychological training.⁵

Concurring, Harold Merskey notes that although following the publication of the War Office report on shell shock ‘only negligible discussions occurred ... the notion of hysteria in response to stress was established.’⁶ The Mental Treatment Act of 1930, which, among other things, introduced outpatient and voluntary treatment at psychiatric hospitals, improved after-care, established systematic research into mental disorder and disassociated it from the Poor Law, and abolished the stigmatising terms “asylum” and “lunatic,” was hailed by *The Lancet* as ‘a great and striking advance in the law governing the treatment of mental illness.’⁷

There was progress, too, in the United States. Developments here were made, much like in Britain, at a leisurely pace. They were such that, however, as Andrew Scull remarks, ‘[o]nly

³ Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010; first published 1995), 2, 5. There were also a number of films produced in Hollywood around this time that were critical of the war, doing so through the representation of the social and economic fallout, rather than shell shock. The director Mervyn LeRoy seems particularly associated with these pictures: among them are *I Am a Fugitive from a Chain Gang* (1932) and *Gold Diggers of 1933* (co-directed with Busby Berkeley, 1933), as well as Ernst Lubitsch’s *Broken Lullaby* (1932) and Raoul Walsh’s *The Roaring Twenties* (1939). LeRoy would also go on to direct *Random Harvest*, the subject of chapter three, in 1942.

⁴ Smith & Pear, *Shell Shock and Its Lessons*, xi.

⁵ Shephard, *A War of Nerves*, 161.

⁶ Harold Merskey, ‘After Shell-Shock: Aspects of Hysteria since 1922’, in Freeman, H. & Berrios, G. E. (eds.), *150 Years of British Psychiatry, Vol. II: The Aftermath* (London: Gaskell, 1996), 89.

⁷ Anon., ‘The Board of Control and the Mental Treatment Act, 1930’, *The Lancet*, 216:5591 (1930), 923.

in the United States ... were the shell-shocked veterans eventually accepted as battle-scarred heroes, worthy of acknowledgment and thanks.’⁸ The responsibility for psychiatric cases, which in late 1919 ‘constituted over 38% of all hospitalised veterans,’ was handed over to the newly formed Veterans’ Bureau in 1921, and by 1925, Shephard contends, the effects of ‘the long American tradition of generosity to veterans’ was beginning to be felt in earnest.⁹

This newfound understanding of the dire psychological impact of war appeared to dampen enthusiasm for war itself. In the cinematic evidence, there are significant links between pacifist sentiment and the willingness to portray shell shock in honest detail – as we will see in the latter half of this chapter. The lessons of the war neuroses and their positive effects in the interwar epoch were not an unqualified, however, for as much good as it did for the conditions of and attitudes towards the mentally ill, they struck a blow to those in society who still clung to pre-war notions of hegemonic masculinity. This chapter examines four films that, in their commentary on the psychological traumas of the Great War and its renegotiation of the masculine ideal, also closely reflect one of these two key historical facets of the period. James Whale’s *Journey’s End* and Lewis Milestone’s *All Quiet on the Western Front* (both 1930) are indicative of the debate surrounding the extent to which anti-war feeling bled from the wounds of the conflict. *Woman to Woman* (Victor Saville, 1929) and Henry King’s adaptation of Hemingway’s *The Sun Also Rises* (1957) reveal anxieties about cultural modernisation in the aftermath of the war, especially the emancipation of women that was so central to it.

Pacifism: *Journey’s End* & *All Quiet on the Western Front*

The first central debate of the interwar period, reflected in its films, concerns the extent to which societies were driven toward anti-war attitudes in the wake of the war experience. In the United States, there was clear evidence of a cultural and political shift towards pacifism following the conclusion of the war. The conflict, in which the nation had been reluctant to intervene in the first place, had strengthened public and political support for isolationist

⁸ Andrew Scull, *Hysteria: The Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 172.

⁹ Shephard, *A War of Nerves*, 153.

policies, and '[m]any Americans remained convinced,' as the historian Eric Foner writes, 'that involvement in World War I had been a mistake.'¹⁰ He continues, 'Pacifism spread on college campuses, where tens of thousands of students took part in a "strike for peace" in 1935,' and was powerfully felt, as John W. Chambers II notes, in a surge of anti-war popular culture – 'memoirs, novels, paintings, theatrical productions and motion pictures'¹¹ – with which *All Quiet on the Western Front* is practically synonymous.

In Britain, a similar mood of disillusionment and revulsion towards militarism was fostered by the literary condemnations of Vera Brittain, Siegfried Sassoon, Robert Graves, Ford Madox Ford and others; 'Pacifist organizations like the Peace Pledge Union and the Quakers held public meetings on Armistice Day and distributed anti-war literature.'¹² As George Robb notes, however, 'this did not preclude other, more traditional and patriotic views,' and large swathes of the nation remained resistant to the pacifist cause.¹³ In terms of filmic reflections of this ambiguous atmosphere, Michael Paris has argued that 'while disillusionment with the war did gain ground in Britain, there is scant cinematic evidence to suggest that there was any widespread "turning away" from war in general.'¹⁴

Nowhere is this ambivalence more palpable than in *Journey's End*, the adaptation of R. C. Sherriff's 1928 stage play, a film that has been subject to significant debate over its anti-war leanings. The helplessness and horrors that it depicts lend credence to the long-held notion that it was Britain's foremost contribution to the anti-war canon, but as Michael T. Isenberg contends, the film 'is flawed as a statement against war in that it did not fully retreat from the cult of duty and heroism.'¹⁵ Indeed, Sherriff himself said of his play that 'not a word was spoken

¹⁰ Foner, *Give Me Liberty!*, 801, 802.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 801; John Whiteclay Chambers II, 'All Quiet on the Western Front' (1930): the antiwar film and the image of the First World War', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, 14:4 (1994), 378.

¹² Robb, *British Culture and the First World War*, 222.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Paris, 'Enduring Heroes: British Feature Films and the First World War, 1919-1997', in Paris (ed.), *The First World War and Popular Cinema*, 61.

¹⁵ Michael T. Isenberg, *War On Film: The American Cinema and World War I, 1914-1941* (London; Toronto: Associated University Press, 1981), 137.

against the war, [and] no word of condemnation was uttered by any of its characters.’¹⁶ This may be born, as Paris says, of a peculiarly English attitude: in *Journey’s End*, ‘the War is and Englishmen must carry on.’¹⁷

In sharp contrast to *Woman to Woman*’s limited portrayal of shell shock, which is explored later in this chapter, Whale’s film demonstrates British interwar cinema’s capability of representing the disorder with great ‘psychological realism,’ presenting a more nuanced portrayal of its physical and cultural manifestations.¹⁸ The story is concerned with a group of British Army officers, particularly Captain Stanhope (Colin Clive), and the men under their command as they occupy a trench in preparation for an attack during the final year of the war. In the opening scene, a conversation between Captain Hardy (Robert Adair) and Lieutenant Osborne (Ian Maclaren), who has arrived to relieve him from duty, reveals that Stanhope – the commanding officer in the dugout in which much of the film is set – has turned to alcohol for relief from the burden of a war that has left him on the precipice of psychological collapse. As the film generates an effective atmosphere of trauma – the sounds of shell bombardment are a menacingly incessant aural accompaniment to the visual claustrophobia of the trench dugout – Stanhope and the others seem able to do no more than demonstrate a typically British “stiff upper lip” in response. Shell shock is spoken about, but only ever in euphemism – he is “a bit quick-tempered” or suffering from “the strain.” Stanhope demonstrates all the qualities of a ‘typical neurasthenic,’ Shephard writes of the character, ‘an officer or sergeant who ... had spent months trying to control his fears before finally breaking down.’¹⁹

Stanhope is overwhelmed by his inability to adhere to the code of manly behaviour dictated by his character and social circumstance. As a public school-educated member of the British middle classes, he is expected to maintain this stoicism and mental fortitude in the face of extraordinarily testing conditions. His place as an officer, and therefore as a leader – an

¹⁶ R. C. Sherriff qtd. in Andrew Kelly, *Cinema and the Great War*, Electronic ed. (London; New York: Routledge, 2005), 56.

¹⁷ Paris, ‘Enduring Heroes’, 61.

¹⁸ Napper, ‘Remembrance, Re-membling and Recollection: Walter Summers and the British War Film of the 1920s’, in Hammond, M. & Williams, M. (eds.), *British Silent Cinema and the Great War* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 115.

¹⁹ Shephard, *A War of Nerves*, 57.

extension of his position in the class hierarchy – only reinforces this requirement. The film indeed appears to subscribe to the notion that, because of these more rigid expectations, officers were more likely to suffer breakdowns than the mostly working-class men under their command. There is certainly a sense of separation between the two factions, the latter of whom do seem to be somewhat immune to the stresses of their situation (including the “temporary gentleman” officer, Second Lieutenant Trotter), at least judging by their external reactions. A number of scholars have drawn attention to the film’s hackneyed depiction of the working classes – Amy Sargeant calls them ‘comic cockneys,’ and Kenton Bamford compares their ‘far from realistic’ portrayal to its treatment of officers, which he notes is ‘not far short of idolatry.’²⁰ This, Bamford claims, was a common dynamic in British films of the time – indeed, one contemporary critic decried the representation of the Army’s rank and file as mere ‘comic idiots, when their officers are shown as superior-minded young gentlemen performing heroic actions.’²¹ Shephard has noted that, in the Army, recruits of lower intelligence were often preferred because they were thought to make better soldiers.²² In *Journey’s End*, Stanhope seems somewhat envious of the company cook, Private Mason, and what he calls his “lack of imagination,” implying that it is an overactive mind – a more intelligent one, perhaps – that is at the root of his trauma.

Stanhope clearly places great stock in these standards of repression and stoicism, which only exacerbates his condition. This point is made by his refusal to take the medical leave to which he is entitled – saying that he “has to keep it together for the men” – and his attitude towards malingerers. He condemns Second Lieutenant Hibbert (Anthony Bushell), who complains of lack of sleep and neuralgia – probably to escape the stress of the front – as “another worm trying to wriggle home” and denies him leave. Stanhope piles further pressure upon himself to meet these unattainable male ideals. The arrival of the young Second

²⁰ Amy Sargeant, ‘A Victory and a Defeat as Glorious as a Victory’: *The Battles of the Coronel and Falkland Islands* (Walter Summers, 1927), in Hammond & Williams (eds.), *British Silent Cinema and the Great War*, 84; Kenton Bamford, *Distorted Images: British National Identity and Film in the 1920s* (London; New York: I. B. Tauris, 1999), 167.

²¹ Bamford, *Distorted Images*, 167; Paul Rotha, *Celluloid: The Film To-day* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1931), 180.

²² Shephard, *A War of Nerves*, 26.

Lieutenant Raleigh (David Manners), an old schoolmate of Stanhope's, throws these issues into sharp relief. Raleigh hero-worshipped his new commanding officer during their school days together; he greatly admired the older boy, who we learn captained the school Rugby team – a trait that serves as an effective shorthand to exemplify Raleigh's idealised perception of him. The younger man's appearance in Stanhope's trench, finding his schoolyard hero in his nervous state, represents a threat to this robust and manly image. It is Raleigh's line of communication with his sister – with whom Stanhope is in a relationship – that constitutes the bigger danger to the Captain's sense of manhood, via what George Pearson, one of the film's producers, called the 'unseen presence of Woman.'²³ The Captain is resistant to Raleigh joining his company, and worried that he will reveal his drinking to her, threatening his dominance within the relationship. He wanted to 'keep absolutely fit for her,' he declares. Unable to do so, he resorts to censoring Raleigh's letters, believing that, as a result, "she'll keep on thinking [he's] a fine fellow."

The claimed psychological realism with which *Journey's End* proceeds may be most evident in its depiction of shell shock as an infantilising influence – which, we recall, is Meyer's view of the more accurate definition of its effect on the male. The most significant example of this within the text is found in Stanhope's relationship with Osborne. The latter is established early on as the company's surrogate father figure – he is the eldest there; his grey hair, moustache and pipe paint an image of an old English schoolmaster even before we discover that that is exactly what he was before the war. He is benevolent and trustworthy. The men have nicknamed him, appropriately, "Uncle." These paternal qualities effectively nullify any authority Stanhope has in outranking Osborne, as evidenced by the older man being the only member of the company the Captain will speak to openly about his condition. This parental relationship dynamic is illustrated in a scene in which Osborne tucks his drunken comrade, childlike, into bed.

²³ George Pearson qtd. in Bamford, *Distorted Images*, 165.

It may seem dubious to draw any sort of parallel between the war propaganda analysed in chapter one and *All Quiet on the Western Front*, perhaps the definitive anti-war film of the era. Yet they are similar in their use of shell shock to serve an ideological interest. The former, eager to promote the war effort as a valiant and worthwhile endeavour, were unusual among the cinematic propaganda of the time in that they represented the disorder at all – typically, as we have seen, it was absent. Insofar as they did, they presented a distorted or limited version. The latter, Lewis Milestone’s adaptation of Erich Maria Remarque’s 1929 novel, uses war trauma to the advantage of a pacifist message. It is, perhaps, for this reason that it is willing to represent shell shock in such realistic and uncompromising detail. It was a shrewd decision on the part of Universal boss Carl Laemmle to adapt Remarque’s novel for the Hollywood screen when he did, for it reflected and spoke to the growing anti-war mood in late-twenties and early-thirties America that was engendered by the consequences of the Great War.²⁴

The film opens with a scene that is mirrored in numerous First World War narratives: the army recruitment drive that appeals to its targets’ desire to live up to expectations of duty and sacrifice – in other words, to “be a man.”²⁵ In Germany, a teacher addresses a classroom of young men, giving a rousing speech that promises heroic glory in the name of the Fatherland; that they will become “iron men of Germany,” should they join up and fight. Not only does this scene demonstrate the gendered connotation of these calls to arms – the evocation of a sense of responsibility to a nation that characterises itself as fatherly is filtered down through another authority figure, the teacher – it also provides opportunity to introduce the central characters,

²⁴ A sequel based on Remarque’s novel *The Road Back* was directed by James Whale in 1937, attempting to capture an atmosphere of depression and estrangement in post-war Germany. It was heavily edited for anti-war and anti-German content by studio bosses fearing a boycott by the German government, who had earlier banned the book. See Andrew Kelly, *All Quiet on the Western Front: The Story of a Film* (London; New York: I. B. Tauris, 2002), 139-42.

²⁵ One of the most striking portrayals of this in film is in Richard Attenborough’s satirical musical *Oh! What a Lovely War* (1969), in which a music hall singer (Maggie Smith) urges her audience to “be a man, enlist today” and “make your girlfriend proud of you.” Such representations were, of course, reflections of historical patterns – print recruitment propaganda in Britain, for instance, was saturated with very overtly gendered themes. The 1914 advertisement “Lord Kitchener Wants You,” featuring the moustachioed Secretary of State for War pointing directly at the reader, is the best known and most obvious example; others were emblazoned with such slogans as “Daddy, what did you do in the Great War?” and “Women of Britain say ‘Go!’” See Meg Albrinck, ‘Humanitarians and He-Men: Recruitment Posters and the Masculine Ideal’, in James, P. (ed.), *Picture This: World War I Posters and Visual Culture* (Lincoln, NE; London: University of Nebraska Press, 2009).

whose ordinariness encourages audience identification. There is Paul Bäumer (Lew Ayres), whom we follow throughout, and his classmates-turned-comrades who, following their training with the authoritarian and sadistic Corporal Himmelstoß (John Wray), join up with a company of older, already battle-scarred veterans, including their *de facto* leader, Kat (Louis Wolheim). As the boys listen to their teacher's words, each in turn imagines the romantic scenes that might result from their war service – proud fathers; adoring crowds; “the adulation of heroes.” There are no heroes, however, as the film goes on to illustrate – only ‘ordinary boys who merely aimed at surviving; there was no glamour nor romance and no predictable end except death.’²⁶ The film takes the disintegration of these fantasies as its focal point, following the men's transformation from idealistic youths to soldiers, discovering the harsh realities of the war, and, eventually, death.

All Quiet could only be successful as an anti-war narrative if it managed to elicit the necessary feelings of sympathy, empathy, anger, and revulsion in its audience towards the scenes that they witnessed unfolding onscreen. Thus, it was to its advantage not to shy away from the harrowing details of the war's bleakest truths, and the shattering of both the body and the mind is central. Especially in terms of the latter, the psychological trauma, the film goes beyond mere representation and into the realms of the experiential and the sensory in an attempt to replicate the experience of war and forge connections between film and spectator. It is rare to read an account of the film that does not refer to it as a bodily, visceral, almost physiological experience: it ‘transformed the movie theatre into a battlefield,’ as Pierre Sorlin puts it, and ‘spectators were overwhelmed.’²⁷ Contemporary reviews made similar observations: the critic for *Variety* supposed that ‘those before the screen had endured with the German soldiers all of their horrors, frights, amputations, privations and deaths,’ and, as *The Spectator* reported, ‘The effect is frightful ... The hand-to-hand struggles are so realistic that they are almost unbearable.’²⁸

²⁶ Sorlin, ‘Cinema and the Memory of the Great War’, in Paris (ed.), *The First World War and Popular Cinema*, 18.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ Anon., ‘Review: ‘All Quiet on the Western Front’’, *Variety* (7 May 1930) <www.variety.com/1930/film/reviews/

‘Milestone jolted his audience right onto the battlefield,’ Chambers contends, ‘by simultaneously bombarding their senses and their emotions.’²⁹ The director utilised a combination of expressionistic – he cited the German expressionist filmmakers as a major influence³⁰ – and realist techniques to create this response. Probably the most remarked upon of the latter is the lack of non-diegetic sound; the soundtrack consists solely of the aural landscape of the battlefield – ‘the gun shots, the rattling of machine-guns and the whistling of bullets;’ the piercing screech of artillery shells as they drop and ground-shattering thud of their impact.³¹ One critic noted the unsettling effect of the sheer volume of the production.³² Even silence takes on an ominous character – in one battle sequence, it heralds the imminent counter-attack of enemy troops. There are expressionistic qualities to the way in which the film gives visual form to the soldiers’ psychological ordeal. The theme of physical – and, consequently, mental – entrapment, effectively illustrated when two soldiers attempt to escape from a dugout and into the almost certain death of no man’s land because they will “go crazy staying here,” becomes tightly framed close-ups of stricken faces. Their chaotic and frenzied mental state is mimicked in a particularly striking sequence that cuts rapidly between a series of these shots. The students’ first taste of the realities of combat at the front, where they must venture out to erect barbed wire fences, takes place at night, allowing for moments in which shells burst suddenly out of the blackness – visual and aural shocks for audience and characters alike. The darkness imbues these images with a heightened sense of terror and confusion – they and we are blind to the many threats that lurk there. Blindness, perhaps not coincidentally, is the fate that befalls one of the men, before he is killed, in this scene. This lack of spatial awareness is a central feature of even the daylight combat sections, which are typically

all-quiet-on-the-western-front-1200410362/>; C. S., ‘All Quiet on the Western Front. At the Alhambra and Regal Cinemas,’ *The Spectator* (28 June 1930), 1045.

²⁹ Chambers II, ‘All Quiet on the Western Front’, 388.

³⁰ *Ibid*, 387.

³¹ Sorlin, ‘Cinema and the Memory of the Great War’, 18.

³² ‘Settling down does not involve suggestions of quiet in this instance, for the noisy booming of artillery and the scream of the bursting shells are ever present reminders that this film production is 100% sound.’ Anon., “All Quiet on the Western Front” Settles Down for Run’, *The New Leader* (10 May 1930), 6.

blanketed in mist: for them and us, optically and psychologically, little else exists in these moments save the devastated landscape of tangled mud, bodies, and barbed wire (Figure 6).



Fig. 6. The visual purgatory of the trenches in *All Quiet on the Western Front*.

The dominant mode in which *All Quiet* perceives shell shock's deleterious effect on masculine identity is a departure from the films we have looked at thus far. It aligns the traumatised soldier less with the woman or child and a great deal more with the inhuman. Immediately prior to the night-time mission mentioned above, Kat warns the new recruits, "you're gonna see some shell fire, and you're gonna be scared," and that they should retreat in these moments into "Mother Nature... press yourself down upon her, bury yourselves deep into her." In doing this, they are reduced to the level of the bestial and subhuman. This is particularly well illustrated when, during an advance, Paul buries himself in a shell crater, hugging closely to its muddy walls. A series of low-angle point-of-view shots show advancing soldiers jumping over him as he gazes up, unable to muster his courage, from his muddy sanctuary. This becomes the site of perhaps his defining traumatic experience as he wounds the enemy soldier that joins him there, and must watch the long, drawn-out agony of his death. He can bear all that is thrown at him, Paul says, except the sounds of the man dying. There are more concrete references to the animalistic qualities of shell-shocked men – when Himmelstoß, a postman in peacetime, is promoted to a position of power, he attempts forcibly to establish a

masculine authority through cruel and tyrannical treatment of his cadets. When he joins them at the front and breaks down in fear, refusing to continue his advance, this illusion of true manliness destroyed, and Paul calls him a “yellow rat.” Wray’s performance here, hissing and squealing his protests, could be interpreted as bestial in character. The more general stress of their situation – albeit not shell shock in its most precisely defined form – is also a catalyst for primitive behaviour. The motif of food (or, more precisely, the lack of it) is indicative of this: they must crawl in the mud to obtain it – Kat does so before stealing a hog from a supply truck; when it is present it is consumed ravenously; savagely; vigilantly.

The language that Kat uses in the “Mother Nature” scene also suggests something, of course, about the feminine as a site of trauma and rehabilitation. The men are caught between an indoctrinated need to do their duty for the Fatherland and desire to retreat into the protective arms of Mother Nature. They must concede some measure of their masculinity in surrendering to the former, but in doing so they also ensure its protection. The few women that appear in the film are subsequently central to the men’s recovery of even a modicum of their sense of manhood. This is particularly evident in a sequence in which Paul, upon sleeping with a French peasant girl, remarks that all his terror has “fallen away.”

But this proves only a temporary respite. The dualism between masculine and feminine elements of the men’s psychology is mirrored in the ‘sharp divergence between military and civilian society, between battlefield and home front. Civilian society is characterized by the strident chauvinism of influential males such as Paul’s father, his schoolteacher, or by the intense anguish of helpless women such as Paul’s mother and sister.’³³ It is here, in the later scenes, that the film situates the more permanent of the war’s psychological scars. The jingoistic zeal that pervades early scenes gives way to a climate of profound alienation and loss of innocence. When Paul, on furlough from the front, visits his old classroom, his attitude has been transformed by his experiences. His naïve enthusiasm for war has vanished; his former teacher’s words – now addressed to a new class of potential recruits – no longer stirring, but corrupt and deceptive. It is this ‘lack of understanding of civilians [that] poignantly drives Paul

³³ Chambers II, ‘All Quiet on the Western Front’, 382.

back early to the front where his comrades understand the senselessness and the horror of war.’³⁴ He mourns for lost days of childlike innocence and maternal security. He visits his mother whilst on leave, and after she kisses him and leaves his bedside, he laments, “Mother, you still think I’m a child... why can’t I put my head in your lap and cry.” The final scene underscores this sense of innocence lost. As Chambers describes it:

Shortly before the armistice, a French sniper kills Paul Bäumer as he reaches out to touch a butterfly just beyond his trench. Juxtaposing the fragility and beauty of life with imminent death by means of ironic sound effects (a soldier's harmonica plays softly in the background) and visual cross-cutting among shots of the French rifleman, Paul, and the butterfly, Milestone focuses on a close-up of Paul's hand reaching out across the parched, lifeless earth toward an embrace of life – the butterfly, a symbol of his lost innocence and youth, a reminder of his adolescent, butterfly-collecting days. But instead of life – death: the sharp crack of a rifle, the spasmodic jerk of the hand which slowly relaxes in death. The harmonica suddenly stops. The sensitive, young, schoolboy-soldier has become just another corpse in the trenches.³⁵

In fitting with the film’s anti-war agenda, it is an austere note on which to close. It implies that, as Nigel Hunt puts it, ‘this shattering of lives shall be permanent for many of the soldiers’ whose physical bodies have survived their ordeal, and ‘that what is being destroyed on the battlefield shall never be rebuilt.’³⁶

The New Woman: *Woman to Woman* & *The Sun Also Rises*

The war neuroses had thoroughly undermined both the notion that hysteria was exclusive to women and the image of unerring courage, endurance and heroism that defined military masculinity. Throughout the scholarship on the war’s legacy in the interwar period, we find references to the great impact of war trauma on the politics of the sexes. Shell shock was a

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 389-90.

³⁶ Nigel Hunt, ‘The contribution of *All Quiet on the Western Front* to our understanding of psychological trauma’, *European Psychiatry*, 19:8 (2004), 492.

‘paralysis which struck at the very basis of masculinity and which shook to the core former definitions of sexual difference,’ as Alison Light puts it.³⁷ For Elaine Showalter,

In many respects, it seemed as if women had benefitted from the social upheaval of the war ... In the decade after the war, the incidence of female hysteria dramatically declined. Many believed that women had become stronger and less vulnerable to mental breakdown when they were faced with real crises and when they were given meaningful work ... Furthermore, the field of psychiatry seemed more open to women’s participation, to women’s ideas, and to new thinking about female psychology.³⁸

In the two nations, the lessons of shell shock were working to close the gap between the genders. Light argues that the post-war years in Britain were characterised by a ‘strongly anti-heroic mood’ that catalysed a ‘redefinition of Englishness’ that was ‘at once less imperial and more inward-looking, more domestic and more private – and, in terms of pre-war standards, more “feminine”’.³⁹ Shephard offers a more cross-cultural assessment:

The real point about shell-shock – in the culture of the 1920s – was that it undermined men’s authority, and with it the traditional roles of the sexes in the family: men, supposed to be strong, self-controlled, the providers to the household, were reduced to being weak, self-pitying, dependent creatures. Women, hitherto the main sufferers from mental illness, now became carers. For both sexes that was hard to handle.⁴⁰

There is some debate over whether or not these apparent ideological progressions resulted in much solidly definable change. Showalter claims that, in Britain, ‘the real effect of these changes was disappointing; in cold reality the political or psychic victories women gained during the war were few. By the 1920s, women found themselves with little progress besides the vote,’ a right that had been granted to the first women in 1918.⁴¹ Light, however, maintains that ‘the decimation of the British male population coincided with (and no doubt contributed to),

³⁷ Alison Light, *Forever England: Femininity, Literature and Conservatism Between the Wars* (London; New York: Routledge, 1991), 8.

³⁸ Showalter, *The Female Malady*, 195-6.

³⁹ Light, *Forever England*, 8.

⁴⁰ Shephard, *A War of Nerves*, 149.

⁴¹ Showalter, *The Female Malady*, 196. The Representation of the People Act 1918 enfranchised ‘women over 30 who met minimum property qualifications.’ See ‘Representation of the People Act 1918’, *parliament.uk* <www.parliament.uk/about/living-heritage/transformingsociety/electionsvoting/womenvote/parliamentary-collections/collections-the-vote-and-after/representation-of-the-people-act-1918/>.

increased female emancipation, politically, socially, sexually,’ and Shephard describes a post-war Britain in which the female workforce was 50% larger and 700,000 women had ably stepped into jobs vacated by men.⁴² Across the Atlantic, there was a similar story. The 19th amendment to the United States constitution was ratified in August 1920, guaranteeing the right to vote for all American women⁴³; the New Woman, who, emerging in the late 19th century, had ‘rejected the traditional role for women and demanded emancipation,’ was thus legitimised in the political sphere.⁴⁴ There was undoubtedly an anxiety about these new freedoms that women had gained during the war, and in Britain, at least, a mood of ‘renewed conservatism about sex roles and gender issues.’⁴⁵

The 1929 production of *Woman to Woman* is the second of three adaptations of Michael Morton’s 1921 play.⁴⁶ A British Army officer, David Compton (George Barraud), meets and falls in love with a French dancer, Lola (Betty Compson) in Paris whilst on leave from the Western Front. He falls victim to shell shock when he returns to the fighting. The action then moves to after the war, finding David married to a British woman, Vesta (Juliette Compton), with no memory of the war or his liaison with Lola – until she appears with news of his illegitimate child.

Woman to Woman does not follow the trend set by many of its peers in offering a more enlightened version of war trauma. This romantic melodrama employs a simplistic understanding of shell shock. The cause of David’s condition is dealt with, swiftly, in a scene depicting his trench being hit by shellfire; after which he is lifted to his feet by a medic and appears disoriented. His lone psychological symptom – amnesia – very obviously serves a main narrative thread that depends on his ignorance of Lola, their affair and the illegitimate child.

⁴² Light, *Forever England*, 8; Shephard, *A War of Nerves*, 147.

⁴³ See ‘19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution: Women’s Right to Vote’, *National Archives* <www.archives.gov/historical-docs/document.html?doc=13>.

⁴⁴ Carolyn Christensen Nelson, ‘Introduction’, in Nelson, C. C. (ed.), *A New Woman Reader: Fiction, Articles and Drama of the 1890s* (Peterborough, ON: Broadview, 2001), ix.

⁴⁵ Showalter, *The Female Malady*, 197.

⁴⁶ The first adaptation (1923), starring Clive Brook and Betty Compson, directed by Graham Cutts and notable for being among a young Alfred Hitchcock’s earliest screen credits, is now considered a lost film. The third, directed by Maclean Rogers in 1946, transplanted the action to the Second World War.

The walking stick David uses in post-war scenes could indicate a coincidental physical wound, but could also, arguably, suggest the film's subscription to biological theories of the causes of shell shock – theories already outmoded, as we have seen from Charles Myers' writings, by the time of production. Clearly, this is not a film that is concerned with delivering an accurate or nuanced depiction of the disorder.

However, it does ask a number of pertinent questions about shell shock's links with masculinity and British national identity. We first meet David and one of his fellow soldiers outside a French nightclub, where a local tells them they can "forget the four long years of war." It is 1918, and the conflict indeed seems to have taken a psychological toll. His comrade's nerves, he admits, "aren't as strong as they used to be." Their 10-day leave, David remarks, is "240 hours of life." The mental stresses of trench warfare – the attrition, the constantly lingering threat of destruction – is tantamount to death. In a literal sense, of course, it is always hanging over their heads, but we may also read this as the death of identity. The trench-dwelling soldiers are essentially instruments of war, no longer *men* but cannon fodder – little more than cattle, as Wilfred Owen so memorably put it.⁴⁷ Lola enters the scene, performing a musical number meant, in her words, to instil in its audience "heart" and "courage to face the enemy." Hers is an optimistic perspective free from the influence of the horrors of combat. To David's battle-scarred ears it is naïve, and he is unrestrainedly critical: "Don't get sentimental over this rotten war ... it's bad enough without singing about it ... it's the songs about war that make war possible, if they told the truth about it, what a filthy thing it is instead of glorifying it, nobody would ever start one." The courage, vigour and patriotism that defined him as a soldier and as a man, assuming it once existed, have escaped him, his existence a hell of fear and futility that he feeds into this anti-war rhetoric.

His rift with Lola, however, proves short-lived. Their next meeting, outside the nightclub, finds Lola high above the street, sitting in the window of her room. This sequence draws several parallels to *Romeo and Juliet*'s famous balcony scene: visually they are strikingly

⁴⁷ From his 1917 poem *Anthem for Doomed Youth*: 'What passing-bells for those who die as cattle...' Wilfred Owen, 'Anthem for Doomed Youth' (1917). *The First World War Poetry Digital Archive* <www.oucs.ox.ac.uk/ww1lit/collections/item/3290>.



Fig. 7. David and Lola pastiche *Romeo and Juliet*'s balcony scene in *Woman to Woman*.

similar (Figure 7), and both illustrate a divide between potential lovers. Here, it is not the impossibility of an affair between members of rival families but a gap between ideological perspectives on the war that the film sees as being based in gender. Following David's denunciation of the war in the previous scene, this exchange takes place:

LOLA: That is not the way I feel.

DAVID: *You* wouldn't.

In this context, "You" (Lola) could be read as a combination of two qualities that situate her as David's opposite. Her emotionality ("I sing it that way because I feel it"), sentimentality and naivety stem, in his eyes perhaps, from her femininity, and from her civilian status and therefore inexperience of the realities of combat. However, from her windowsill perch, looking down on the emasculated David (a power relationship that the film further emphasises through a sequence of low-angle shots of the former and high-angles of the latter), she holds all the power. He apologises for the harshness with which he treated her previously, and wonders if she might invite him up to her room. She shakes her head. She will, however, and does, meet him downstairs. In doing so, she retains her control over the relationship but symbolically puts power back into the hands of the male, allowing him to court her. Lola, described as an "angel" in the film – a quintessential image of femininity – helps to restore his sense of masculinity.

Just as Juliet believed that family differences could be overcome in the name of love, so too does Lola conclude that the ideological gap that divides herself and David can be bridged for the same reason. A whirlwind romance follows, culminating in a marriage proposal, but the war gets in the way. While looking for a suitable church in which to take their vows, David is informed of the immediate return of soldiers to the front. He leaves Lola heartbroken, returns to the fighting, and suffers shell shock, thereby setting in motion the events of the rest of the film.

We re-join David in post-war Britain. It quickly becomes clear that the absence of Lola, despite him having no memory of her, has left a void. He holds a senior position at a construction company, and although it has been successful in every one of the five years since the war ended, he is dissatisfied with his life. He possesses all the material things traditionally associated with a successful male – “everything a man could ask for” – “a big business, money, a beautiful home.” He has neglected to include his wife in this list, his business partner points out, as the film cuts to a photograph of her.

Shell shock is such a destabilising factor that the presence of David’s masculine identity becomes dictated by the women around him. Lola, as we have seen, willingly plays the part of the subservient, angelic female, in doing so restoring both his psychological balance and sense of masculinity. After the shell destroys this, he returns home and, in his still-traumatised (amnesiac) state, marries Vesta. As the film sees it, she is everything Lola is not: in almost every sense, she denies him his manhood. With virility such an important male trait, chief among these is her refusal to bear him a child. In other words, she lives up to her namesake, the Roman virgin deity with her celibate priestesses.⁴⁸ This feeds into her generally controlling nature – she is clearly the dominant partner in the relationship, which marks her as masculine. He does want a child – striving for the recovery of his lost manhood – but she will neither divorce him nor consent to adopt. Vesta’s masculine energy and domination of her husband reflect an anxiety,

⁴⁸ The film’s use of the name may be something of a misinterpretation. While Vesta and her priestesses were indeed chaste, she is remembered more as the goddess of the hearth and overseer of the home, family, domesticity and community – quite a contrast to her cold, socialite on-screen namesake. See Jenny March, *Cassell’s Dictionary of Classical Mythology* (London: Cassell, 1998), 781.

in an era of social upheaval and renegotiation of masculinity, about the expansion of civil liberties for women and usurping of male power. In 1928, the year before this version of *Woman to Woman* was released, women's enfranchisement was extended.⁴⁹

We can read the film, then, as defining shell shock as a feminising influence – the two sides of the traditional binary male-female coupling are fulfilled between David and Vesta, effectively in reverse order with the former taking the role of the submissive “female,” but it is unstable for this reason. It is Lola's return that corrects this transgression, restoring David's memory – and therefore “curing,” in the film's interpretation, his shell shock – and returning him to the established position of dominant male. She is described as an angel, as we have already seen, and her white attire aligns her with this image of purity, and also establishes a contrast with the dark hair and black garments of Vesta. Lola's name is also significant, with a connection to the Virgin Mary and therefore maternal subtext, which leads us to the most important of her re-masculinising qualities – she bears David a son.⁵⁰ He is living proof of David's virility, and instantly imbues him with the fatherly virtues of strength and authority. This reclamation of his masculine identity, however, comes at a price. It is tempered by his son's illegitimacy, proof of the pre-marital sex that bore him in an era in which it was still heavily stigmatised. It is, perhaps, a comment on the permanence of the mental scars of war that, although his becoming a father is restorative to his masculinity – and, therefore, his psychological well-being – said restoration is incomplete.

True to its melodramatic form, *Woman to Woman* seems almost hysterical about the threat to traditional ideas of family and masculinity in the aftermath of shell shock. The titular women – Lola and Vesta – seem to represent the past and perceived present of these ideas. One, complicit to the formerly accepted norms of her gender, embodies a fading ideal of male power. The other, dangerously subverting them, is a symbol of the growing anxiety over the gradual

⁴⁹ Equal voting rights for men and women aged 21 and over in Britain were granted by the Equal Franchise Act, 1928. See ‘1928 Equal Franchise Act’, *parliament.uk* <www.parliament.uk/about/living-heritage/transformingsociety/electionsvoting/womenvote/case-study-the-right-to-vote/the-right-to-vote/birmingham-and-the-equal-franchise/1928-equal-franchise-act/>.

⁵⁰ *Lola* is a diminutive of *Dolores*, from the Spanish *Maria de los Dolores* (“Mary of Sorrows”), one of the names by which the Virgin Mary is known in the Catholic Church. See ‘Dolores’, *behindthename.com* <www.behindthename.com/name/dolores>.

decline of male authority. In this context, the film's denouement reads as a death knell for the traditional family structure. Lola, discovering she has heart disease, places David Jr. into the care of his father and Vesta, in the process creating a decidedly untraditional family unit. When Lola, ignoring warnings not to perform due to her ill health, dies in the film's climax, it is the death of the traditional woman and of any hope that conventional gender dynamics might be restored.

If it was in nature, and their physical, primal forms, that American men found their sense of masculinity in the years leading up to the war, then it is in a rapidly modernising society – and the industrialised combat that reflected this world so closely – that we must logically find the source of its destruction. Nowhere is this more evident than in the post-war art of the “Lost Generation,” the group of artists and writers who, returning from war service, so vividly captured their feelings of trauma and alienation in their work. There is perhaps no one more representative of this group than Ernest Hemingway, who popularised the term, credited originally to Gertrude Stein, in the epigraph to his 1926 novel, *The Sun Also Rises*. The story follows Jake Barnes – newspaper reporter, war veteran, and victim of a shell fragment to the spine which has left him impotent – in the France and Spain of 1922. It was adapted for the Hollywood screen in 1957, with Henry King in the director's chair and Tyrone Power in the lead role, providing a visual translation of the novel's complex thematic associations between the destruction of the male body, psychological trauma, and the breakdown of masculinity.

In the course of analysing the film we must ask whether or not the themes of Hemingway's original work, specific as they are to the interwar mood in which it was written, are lost in its translation to screen more than thirty years later. It is a fact of most film adaptations of Hemingway's fiction that they have been received poorly, accused of recreating the ‘literal action’ but little else.⁵¹ This was true of the film adaptations of *A Farewell to Arms* (1932 and 1957) to the extent that any meaningful thematic representation of the war trauma

⁵¹ Robert E. Morsberger, “‘That Hemingway Kind of Love’: Macomber in the Movies’, *Literature/Film Quarterly*, 4:1 (1976), 54.

that permeates the original was destroyed in Hollywood's sanitisation of the story. *The Sun Also Rises* also came under fire for this reason; one reviewer claiming that the novel had been 'castrated.'⁵² This may, indeed, be true – the author himself agreed⁵³ – and the reason why there has been relatively little critical attention paid to film versions of his writings.⁵⁴ However, it is my interpretation that, apart from what has been read as homophobic content, much of the thematic material that is relevant to this study remains in this very literally translated film version.⁵⁵ Permit me, then, to break from the chronology of this thesis to consider this adaptation not in the context of its production, but of its interwar literary foundations, to which, thematically, it is inextricably tied.

As Sandra Gilbert has noted, Jake Barnes occupies a place alongside a large group of 'gloomily bruised modernist anti-heroes' whose war experience has left them emasculated by 'sexual wounds.'⁵⁶ It is significant, in light of my interpretation of a specifically American masculinity based chiefly in the body, that it is made so clear that his injury was initially a bodily one. Long after it has physically healed its profound traumatic consequences lingers in his male psyche. The emasculating effect of his impotence is aggravated, according to Dana Fore, by its invisibility: the traumatic effects of, for example, amputation could be mitigated by its evidencing to the public a heroic sacrifice, but Jake's injury 'cannot be paraded in front of the

⁵² William Murray, "'Sun Also Rises,' Book and Film', *The New Leader* (7 October 1957), 29.

⁵³ Jill Jividen, 'Cinema and Adaptations', in Modellmog, D. A. & del Gizzo, S. (eds.), *Ernest Hemingway in Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 81.

⁵⁴ The literature that does take on the subject focusses little on the close aesthetic or thematic analysis of the films themselves and much more on Hemingway's relationship with the movie industry and, as Bruce Kawin puts it in reviewing Gene D. Phillips' *Hemingway and Film* and Frank M. Laurence's *Hemingway and the Movies*, on 'plot changes, censorship, evasions of realistic treatment, inappropriate happy endings, producer hype, ad copy, and contracts' (Bruce Kawin, 'Review: Hemingway and Film by Gene D. Phillips; Hemingway and the Movies by Frank M. Laurence', *Film Quarterly*, 34:4 [1981], 30). The same can be said of Candace Ursula Grissom's *Fitzgerald and Hemingway on Film: A Critical Study of the Adaptations, 1924-2013* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2014) and Jividen's chapter in *Ernest Hemingway in Context*.

⁵⁵ See Ira Elliott, 'Performance Art: Jake Barnes and "Masculine" Signification in *The Sun Also Rises*', *American Literature*, 67:1 (1995). Its omission, along with its excision of anti-Semitic content, may be attributed to the stringent code of ethics (overseen by the Hays Office) that continued to govern Hollywood productions at the time.

⁵⁶ Sandra M. Gilbert, 'Soldier's Heart: Literary Men, Literary Women, and the Great War', *Signs*, 8:3 (1983), 423.

public for acclaim. Because his wound must remain hidden and unknown, it must also remain “shameful.”⁵⁷

‘The mythical image of Hemingway,’ Richard Fantina writes, ‘as the embodiment of virility in his writings, his exploits, and his very physical presence, asserts itself as quintessentially dominant and aggressive masculinity.’⁵⁸ He has long been thought to personify a muscular and adventurous form of machismo, and his passion for hunting, fishing, and other pursuits pitting man against nature frequently found their way into his writing. It is in this arena – the bullfighting arena, to be specific – that *The Sun Also Rises* locates its idea of masculinity’s daring, primal, and violent zenith. Jake travels from Paris to the city of Pamplona, Spain, home of the famous San Fermín festival, where he witnesses the most renowned of the *encierro*, or Running of the Bulls, and two *corrida* (bullfights). In its evocation of deeply rooted tradition and the pitting of man against beast, the *fiesta* becomes both antidote to the effects of modernisation and the ultimate form of manly endeavour. The *torero* (bullfighter), Romero, in his conquering and slaying of the beast, becomes the epitome of heroic invincibility. As several Hemingway scholars have observed, the *corrida* is also an opportunity to re-write a chaotic wartime experience of powerlessness and emasculation – its ‘ritualized masculine code and the tragedy’s communal experience transform the battlefield ... into an arena where men prove their masculinity’ rather than be deprived of it.⁵⁹ As Johanna Church further explains, ‘The war seemed never-ending and filled with endless slaughter, but a bullfight has distinct sides, rules to be followed, and a clear winner and loser.’⁶⁰ Jake, though permanently emasculated and therefore unable to reach the heights of this ideal, is greatly admiring of it. He instead finds his psychological healing in nature, away from the urban space of Paris or Pamplona, and in the “conquering” of a lesser beast – fish. The film is eager to emphasise the contrast between urban and pastoral, as it does so in the two scenes bridging the characters’ travels from France to Spain

⁵⁷ Dana Fore, ‘Life Unworthy of Life?: Masculinity, Disability, and Guilt in *The Sun Also Rises*’, *The Hemingway Review*, 26:2 (2007), 84.

⁵⁸ Richard Fantina, *Ernest Hemingway: Machismo and Masochism* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 1.

⁵⁹ Michael Von Cannon, ‘Traumatizing Arcadia: Postwar Pastoral in *The Sun Also Rises*’, *The Hemingway Review*, 32:1 (2012), 61.

⁶⁰ Church, ‘Literary Representations of Shell Shock’, 58. See also Linda Wagner-Martin, ‘Introduction’, in Wagner-Martin, L. (ed.), *New Essays on The Sun Also Rises* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 8-9.

– moving swiftly from a sepia-toned Paris cityscape to Jake and his friend, Bill Gorton (Eddie Albert), fishing in a gentle stream in a scene of vibrant Spanish countryside.

It is modernisation – the urban environment and its liberal way of life – that distances men from the ideal represented by the *corrida*. Jake's sense of detachment and alienation is found, partly, in the city, where these feelings are compounded by his 'foreignness.'⁶¹ He works in an office of the New York Herald, among other American expatriates, a sort of microcosm of his pre-war life within, yet also away from, the progressive atmosphere of post-war Paris – a world in which he has been left behind. He is, visually, at home here in muted, traditional colours, but the very same provides a sharp contrast when the scene shifts to a warm and vibrant Parisian street café, where he seems decidedly out of place (Figure 8). It is here that he meets a prostitute, whose brightly-coloured, low-cut dress simultaneously sets her in opposition to Jake and connects her strongly with the environment. We begin to see evidence of traditional gender roles being broken down in her masculine manner: her voice is deep and gravelly; she is a skilled drinker, swiftly draining her glass, much to Jake's surprise; and she speaks her mind, even drawing attention to Jake's otherness when she tells him she does not like his hat. Jake attempts, feebly, to assert some level of dominance – her choice of drink is "not good for a little girl," he says; "little girl yourself" is her retort. This seems to deflate Jake's masculine ego remarkably quickly, and he later assumes a subservient role when he asks her to buy him dinner. Finally, her very profession is a clear statement on the newfound sexual liberation of women.

This scene begins to evidence the fact that Jake's trauma is manifested most plainly in his interactions with the opposite sex. Fantina has argued that Hemingway contradicts the virile image with which he is so strongly associated, betraying a 'profoundly submissive and passive side' to his character that reveals itself in his portrayal of women: 'Only with difficulty can we visualize a man with Hemingway's imposing, hirsute, and muscular appearance, and his hard-boiled style of writing and conversation, as submissive to women. Yet his fiction unmistakably

⁶¹ Church, 'Literary Representations of Shell Shock', 57.



Fig. 8. Jake Barnes' sense of alienation from the vibrant city and society of interwar Paris is given visual life in *The Sun Also Rises*.

reveals this side of his sexuality.⁶² The prostitute is only one of two significant examples of these women in *The Sun Also Rises*, both of whom represent an emblem of cultural modernisation, the emancipated New Woman. The other is Lady Brett Ashley (Ava Gardner).

The literary parallels between Hemingway's Lady Brett and the subversive New Woman of the roaring twenties are complex and have been thoroughly documented; it would therefore be unnecessary to regurgitate them, in any significant detail, here.⁶³ I want to focus instead on the unique influence of the cinematic form on this construction of Brett and her impact upon the characters around her, particularly the traumatised Jake. The most important indicators of her transgression of pre-war gender norms are her promiscuity – she is twice divorced and enters into various love affairs, indicating a new sexual freedom – and lack of domesticity – she is independent, moving freely within and between the film's locations, not confined, as a traditional woman would be, to a domestic space. It is expressed in her physical appearance – with her androgynous bobbed haircut, as Rena Sanderson interprets it, she is the epitome of the 'sexy modern woman' and 'antithesis of her corseted, ruffled, and straitlaced Victorian foremother.'⁶⁴

⁶² Fantina, *Machismo and Masochism*, 1.

⁶³ See Wendy Martin, 'Brett Ashley as New Woman in *The Sun Also Rises*', in Wagner-Martin (ed.), *New Essays on The Sun Also Rises*; James Nagel, 'Brett and the Other Women in *The Sun Also Rises*', in Donaldson, S. (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Ernest Hemingway* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

⁶⁴ Rena Sanderson, 'Hemingway and Gender History', in Donaldson (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Ernest Hemingway*, 177-8.

Red is a motif that is strongly associated with Brett. She is wearing a sweater in a bright shade of the colour when we first meet her in a Paris bar, and it appears frequently in her costuming thereafter. It is perhaps obvious that red is symbolic of the aspects of lust and dangerous sexuality related to her character, but it takes on a somewhat more complex meaning when we consider its prominence within the *corrida*, the red *muleta* (cape) being such a deeply ingrained emblem of the spectacle. It suggests a link between the ritualised combat of the bullfight and a similarly aggressive, competitive form of courtship that the various men surrounding Brett – Jake, Robert Cohn (Mel Ferrer), and Mike Campbell (Errol Flynn) – engage in. Brett is simultaneously matador – corralling and dominating these men as she does – and bull, finally tamed by the only character who embodies a more commanding masculinity, Romero. The others, Jake and Cohn especially, are equated with the steer – or castrated bull – of the bullfight. As she moves from initial attraction through the stages of courtship with the matador, the film defines visually her mutation from “new” to traditional femininity; we notice the reds turning, gradually more subdued, to blacks, then, at the height of their romance, to more traditional garments in muted blues and whites. These parallel her appearance in a flashback scene, depicting Brett and Jake in an army hospital during the war, where her job as a nurse ties her to a more conventional female role.

The traumas of the First World War precipitated massive transformations in many aspects of society. The post-war world proved fertile ground for progressive thought, advancing the renegotiation of the cultural gulf between men and women – and the emergence of the transgressive New Woman – along with a surge in pacifist feeling. These new characteristics, as this chapter has explored, were keenly felt in the cinematic imagination of the inter-war years, but with another global conflict on the horizon, was this bold new approach to last?

Reassurance in an Age of Anxiety: Rewriting Trauma in *Random Harvest*

It comes as little surprise to find that the representation of the First World War in the cinemas of both the United Kingdom and the United States petered out as the two nations led the world into the second global conflict of the 20th century. The immediacy of the Second World War naturally superseded the memory of the First in cinematic production, and the realism and solemnity of the interwar canon was often replaced, in the few portrayals of the earlier war that did appear, by a patriotic preoccupation with the current. In the U.S., William Keighley's *The Fighting 69th* (1940) fictionalised the heroic real-life exploits of its titular regiment, and *Sergeant York* (Howard Hawks, 1941) told the true story of Alvin York, a conscientious objector turned highly decorated war hero, commenting 'on the U.S. political conversion from isolation from to intervention in World War II' and asserting the 'justness of the nation's military campaigns.'¹ *Sergeant York* was made in an attempt to create a positive narrative around World War II, by 'recast[ing] the Great War as a reasonable national enterprise, not as the crazy slaughterhouse depicted in literature and film for the previous twenty years. Despair, meaninglessness, pacifism – the dominant legacy of the suicide of Europe – had to be erased, rejected, or revamped.'² Its hugely successful release – the most successful of 1941 – coincided with the attack on Pearl Harbor, and perhaps had a hand in the subsequent upsurge in military recruitment.³ There was also Fox's reverential biopic of America's First World War president, *Wilson* (Henry King, 1944). In Britain, a handful of Second World War films made passing reference to the earlier war: Powell and Pressburger's *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp* (1943), which included a flashback sequence set in France as a small part of a narrative concerned with the problem of British national identity during World War II, and, as Michael

¹ J. David Slocum, 'General Introduction: Seeing Through American War Cinema', in Slocum, J. D. (ed.), *Hollywood and War: The Film Reader* (New York; London: Routledge, 2006), 5, 12.

² Doherty, *Projections of War*, 100.

³ Lary May, 'Hollywood and the World War II Conversion Narrative', in Slocum (ed.), *Hollywood and War*, 191.

Paris notes, the propaganda short *The Dawn Guard* (Roy Boulting, 1941) and Leslie Howard's *The Gentle Sex* (1943), but this was much the extent of its incidence.⁴

Shell shock's absence from the cinema of this time, then, can be attributed to the lack of representations of the First World War, the context in which it is found. In the exceptions to this trend, as in the examples above, the thematic implications of trauma were often antithetical to the ideological messages these films advanced. There is just one significant portrayal of shell shock to emerge from either nation during World War II. *Random Harvest* (Mervyn LeRoy, 1942), an adaptation, in the mode of classical Hollywood, of James Hilton's novel of the previous year, omits and distorts the realities of shell shock to mould it into the central plot device of a kind of quasi-propaganda for the war effort. The story begins in autumn 1918, just after the end of the First World War, at the county asylum in the fictional town of Melbridge, in the English Midlands. A shell-shocked British officer (Ronald Colman) suffers from a speech impediment, and has no memory of the war or, indeed, of who he is, and is known only as "John Smith." After wandering away from the asylum he meets a singer, Paula (Greer Garson), who cares for him; she and "Smithy," as she calls him, eventually marry. On a trip to Liverpool, he is hit by a car, which restores his recollection of the war and the years preceding it, at the same time as it obliterates his memory of Paula and their new-born child. He is Charles Rainier, son of a successful industrialist. He becomes a wealthy businessperson and politician, entering into a loveless marriage of convenience with his secretary, Margaret – who is really Paula, trying desperately to provoke Charles into remembering their idyllic, but forgotten, life.

Random Harvest is decidedly more concerned with the context of its production than its setting. For Jeffrey Richards, the film sits as a prime example of Hollywood's 'stylized and mythic' vision of England that projected an image of 'an ideal world' that, in the context of the Second World War, 'reinforced the British in their struggle to preserve it and convinced the Americans that it might be worth fighting for too.'⁵ The device of amnesia facilitates the film's

⁴ Paris, 'Enduring Heroes', 66.

⁵ Jeffrey Richards, *Visions of Yesterday* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973), 107.

central theme, of the ‘search for the lost joys of a half-remembered past,’ which is played out in the contrast between the complex life and loveless marriage of the businessman and politician Charles Ranier, and the happiness and simplicity of his life as Smithy, which he longs for but does not recapture until the end of the film. This speaks to a society already aware, pre-war, of

a world changing around them, feeling that somehow the old values and traditions were slipping away ... [these films] are Hollywood’s key to open a door through which an anxious audience may escape into a reassuringly idealized dream world. With the outbreak of war, this middle-class fear of change and decline in status is only intensified. The need for reassurance continues but coupled with it now is the urgent necessity of defending the dream.⁶

This theme of reassurance in an age of anxiety extends to the film’s remembrance of the First World War. We are reminded early in the film of the victory achieved in that war: raucous armistice celebrations are taking place as Smithy walks through the town – always foggy, as if a haze of trauma and lost memory hangs over the place – having just escaped from the asylum; revellers hold placards bearing slogans like “We Beat the Hun” and “Fritz is Licked.” In addition to this, amnesia here being shell shock’s most evident symptom, we might read in the film an urge to its contemporary audiences to “forget” the traumatic parts of the previous war experience. World War I’s psychological traumas are not outright ignored, as they might be in service of this celebratory atmosphere, but an optimistic view is taken of them. In an early scene in the asylum, the sympathetic and likable Dr. Benet walks through a ward of smiling patients with mild symptoms, clearly on their way to recovery. The film is unusual in that its presentation of Smithy’s condition carries very little – if any – connotation of weakened masculinity, in fact, its ideas about gender are limited to Paula’s maternal function as carer to Smithy, whose shell shock the film very clearly presents as infantilising above all else. Benet calls him “my boy” and the opening scenes deal with the unsuccessful search for his parents. His loss of identity is also a regression – an ‘unconscious flight into childhood,’ as Jessica Meyer calls it⁷ – an interpretation reinforced by the site of his only other symptom – speech – having

⁶ *Ibid*, 110.

⁷ Meyer, ‘Separating the Men from the Boys’, 16.

a close association with childhood development. A child, traditionally, needs a mother – a role fulfilled by Paula. As Bosley Crowther, reviewing the film for the *New York Times* in 1942, describes her, '[s]he is the model splendid woman in every desirable respect ... [she] shelters him, mothers him, soothes him and finally marries him in a sweep of rich romance.'⁸ Her maternal qualities are emphasised. In her role as burlesque performer she is a sexual object, commanding a crowd of rowdy men, contrasting her roles as carer, or mother, to the childlike and vulnerable Smithy. She helps to nurse him back to health, taking him to the country, where the traumatic haze of Melbridge and its asylum is lifted; he regains his speech – as a child develops it – and, though his amnesia remains, he is “terribly happy.” Her archetypal, curative femininity is expressed visually through her costume, which is of pure white throughout the scenes of her and Smithy’s idyllic rural existence, imbuing her with the qualities of goodness and security associated with the mother. We can further pinpoint this sense of Smithy’s accelerated “growing-up” in dialogue: “My life began with you,” he tells her at one point. The relative ease with which Paula “cures” Smithy, giving him a new identity to replace the one he lost, suggests that, ultimately, the film does not see the conflict as particularly traumatic: an attempt, perhaps, to rewrite the memory of the war for the sake of the morale of a society in the anxious throes of another.

Random Harvest constitutes the lone representation of shell shock in a social and cinematic landscape understandably preoccupied with World War II. In fact, this is a pattern that, after the boom of images of shell shock during the First World War and into the interwar period, carries forward throughout the decades following the Second. The following chapters, then, are dedicated not only to analysing the representations of the disorder that did crop up, but also to identifying and investigating the significance of the moments that they do so: moments that are particularly pertinent for the cinema to return to the Great War and its psychologically afflicted soldiers.

⁸ Bosley Crowther, “Random Harvest,” With Greer Garson and Ronald Colman, From James Hilton Novel, Opens at the Music Hall’, *The New York Times* (18 December 1942) <www.nytimes.com/movie/review?res=9804E5DC1039E33BBC4052DFB4678389659EDE>.

Shell Shock in Cold War America

Following the allied victory over the Axis powers in the Second World War, American attention turned to the only remaining power that could rival their own on the world stage.¹ The Soviet Union, an ally during the war, now occupied much of Eastern Europe, and had begun in earnest to disseminate the values of communism among its people. Lacking the common enemy that had necessitated their uneasy alliance, their profound ideological differences were brought into sharp relief. For this reason, as Eric Foner notes, it was ‘all but inevitable that the two major powers to emerge from the war would come into conflict.’² The speech given by Winston Churchill in Fulton, Missouri in March 1946, in which he ‘declared that an “iron curtain” had descended across Europe’ and that ‘helped to popularize the idea of an impending long-term struggle between the United States and the Soviets,’ proved highly prescient.³ Following the Truman Doctrine of 1947, the Cold War – the period of political and military tenuousness; the battle of ideologies between East and West; capitalism and communism; individual and collective – would last for more than four decades.⁴ During this time, the United States took part in two major proxy wars – their involvement in both motivated by anti-Communist objectives – in Korea and Vietnam.

Scholars have often noted the gendered character of anti-Communism in the Cold War climate. K. A. Cuordileone describes ‘a political culture that, in the name of combating an implacable, expansionist Communist enemy, put a new premium on hard masculine toughness and rendered anything less than that soft, timid, feminine, and as such a real or potential threat to the security of the nation.’⁵ As Brian Baker succinctly puts it, ‘[t]o fail in producing

¹ Foner, *Give Me Liberty!*, 841.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*, 842.

⁴ The Truman Doctrine evolved from a speech given by the president to Congress in March 1947, in which he asserted that the United States must ‘shoulder the responsibility of supporting “freedom-loving people” wherever communism threatened them’ (*Ibid.*, 843). It helped to establish bipartisan support for his containment policy, which aimed to prevent the expansion of the Soviet Union specifically and of communism more generally.

⁵ K. A. Cuordileone, *Manhood and American Political Culture in the Cold War* (London: Routledge, 2005), viii.

hegemonic masculinity [was] to open the floodgates to communism.’⁶ Barbara Epstein contends that the fight against Communism simply provided a convenient excuse to promote a macho image of America, and that the widespread sense of panic and ‘irrational’ overreaction to the red menace was an ‘expression of concerns that lay closer to home and were more difficult to talk about – in particular, [an] expression of fears about the decline of masculinity’.⁷ Whatever the truth – most likely a heady combination of the two – the projection of a strong, virile masculinity was deemed essential.

Where did cinema fit into this equation? The events of the Second World War had precipitated a fuller appreciation of the psychological trauma of war, but the chances of this materialising, in any major way, in cinematic representations were overshadowed in the social and political environment of post-war America. John Huston’s documentary *Let There Be Light* (1946), which catalogued the nervous conditions and treatment of United States combat veterans returning from service in World War II, was banned by the U.S. Army for over thirty years, ostensibly because of its perceived invasion of its subjects’ privacy; perhaps because of the undesirable images of broken men that it disseminated.⁸ Convergent anxieties about foreign threats and the weakening of masculinity in society became a common fixture of American film output throughout the Cold War period.⁹ In Hollywood film, America’s biggest cultural export, there was an apparent need to project an image of masculine authority and invulnerability, and, simultaneously on a domestic level, a desire to ‘assuage fears’ of masculine degeneration through ‘the depictions of heroic males engaged in military actions.’¹⁰ It was, indeed, the war film where a great deal of this masculine posturing and reassurance took place – it is a genre, after all, in which images of valiant, resourceful, resilient, and muscular men

⁶ Brian Baker, *Masculinity in Fiction and Film: Representing Men in Popular Genres, 1945-2000* (London; New York: Continuum, 2006), 66.

⁷ Barbara Epstein, ‘Anti-Communism, Homophobia, and the Construction of Masculinity in the Postwar U.S.’, *Critical Sociology*, 20:3 (1994), 21.

⁸ Vincent Canby, ‘“Let There Be Light,” John Huston vs. the Army’, *The New York Times* (16 January 1981) <www.nytimes.com/1981/01/16/movies/let-there-be-light-john-huston-vs-the-army.html>.

⁹ See Jones & Wessely, *Shell Shock to PTSD*, 58-86, 98-117, on the impact of World War II on the understanding of war neuroses, or combat fatigue, as it was by then known.

¹⁰ Robert T. Eberwein, *Armed Forces: Masculinity and Sexuality in the American War Film* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2007), 9.

engaging with and defeating a malevolent Other can feel most at home. So, from Truman to Reagan, *The Great Escape* (1963) to *First Blood* (1982), some of the most successful Hollywood war films of this period parallel the concerns of the age, their success proving that this is what audiences wanted to see. Representations of men in these films were, of course, varied and complex – there is already a substantial literature on the subject.¹¹ The salient point here is that, in this popular social and cinematic milieu, there was little room for the defeated man of the war trauma narrative. When he did appear – as we will see – he usually took the form of a traumatised veteran of World War II, Korea, or Vietnam, rather than the shell-shocked trench-dweller.

This is just one of several possible reasons for the lack of filmic representations of shell shock in this period. There is also the fact that American war films looked mostly to the Second World War to represent the moment of their production. Perhaps, because of America's relatively limited involvement in the First World War, filmmakers felt that these messages would be better heard through a conflict more prominent in the public awareness. Or, as Robert Niemi argues, did the later war's greater scale and subsequent developments simply overpower the memory of the former?:

In geopolitical scope, complexity, and sheer ferocity – over 50 million dead – World War II eclipsed World War I in every way. Not surprisingly, the postwar period spawned very few films about the earlier conflict. Under the shadow of the death camps, the Cold War, and the atomic bomb, the 1914-1918 war seemed but a distant nightmare.¹²

Further, the birth of the counterculture movement in the 1960s, as well as the collapse of the Hollywood studio system and arrival of the unrestrained, politically liberal American New Wave, allowed for increasingly explicit political statements on the then-current Vietnam War.

¹¹ See, for example, Steven Cohan, *Masked Men: Masculinity and the Movies in the Fifties* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1997); Susan Jeffords, *Hard Bodies: Hollywood Masculinity in the Reagan Era* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1994).

¹² Robert Niemi, *Inspired by True Events: An Illustrated Guide to More Than 500 History-Based Films*, 2nd ed. (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2013), 63.

Initially, as Frank McAdams notes, they were more subtle; set in previous wars.¹³ Then, after the releases of *The Deer Hunter* and *Apocalypse Now* in the late 1970s ‘pried ajar the tightly sealed Hollywood production doors on Vietnam combat films,’ films set during this conflict, making explicit statements about it, became the norm.¹⁴ This new freedom disposed of any need to look safely back on previous conflicts, and with it, naturally, precluded much representation of the Great War and its psychological traumas.

This is not to say that there were no American World War I films produced during this long Cold War period, but their sporadic presence was usually dominated by heroic or romantic images: Huston’s *The African Queen* (1951), John Ford’s *What Price Glory* (1952), and the 1957 remake of *A Farewell to Arms*, for example, and later *Legends of the Fall* (Edward Zwick, 1994), and Richard Attenborough’s fictionalised account of Ernest Hemingway’s war service, *In Love and War* (1996). There are just a handful of exceptions to this. We have already discussed King’s *The Sun Also Rises*, positioning it in terms of Hemingway’s voice in the post-war period, but its relevance to the post-World War II era must also be acknowledged. As its screenwriter, Peter Viertel, observed, ‘it is fascinating in its impressions of Europe after World War I, because so many of these impressions are duplicated again today.’¹⁵ There were also television remakes of *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1979) and *The Sun Also Rises* (1984), which covered much the same ground as their theatrical cousins, and a short-form documentary called *Goodbye, Billy: America Goes to War, 1917-18* (1972), which traces a journey from pre-war enthusiasm, through the discovery of its realities, and finally to post-war cynicism. The lone examples, in terms of the depiction of personal trauma, of any real originality or significance were Stanley Kubrick’s *Paths of Glory* (1957) and Dalton Trumbo’s *Johnny Got His Gun* (1971). These were both independent productions, and look back to the First World War, a conflict safely in the past, to allegorise and criticise then-current conflicts.

¹³ Frank McAdams, *The American War Film: History and Hollywood* (Westport, CT; London: Praeger, 2002), 205. A spate of successful Vietnam War films followed, including the seminal *Platoon* (1986) and *Full Metal Jacket* (1987).

¹⁴ *Ibid*, 221.

¹⁵ Peter Viertel qtd. in Edwin Schallert, ‘Hemingway’s ‘Sun Also Rises’ Filmed After 30-Year Wait’, *Los Angeles Times* (2 June 1957).

In Trumbo's film, the consequences of profound physical injury dominate its protest of the Vietnam War. This chapter focuses on Kubrick's important and, until relatively recently, undervalued film, which comments upon the Cold War and, to an extent, the Korean War through its representation of the Great War's overwhelming psychological traumas, using the theme as an instrument in its anti-war message.

Kubrick's film is, at its heart, a critique of military hierarchy. The scheming and ambitious General Paul Mireau (George Macready) launches a court-martial of three randomly chosen, innocent soldiers, in order to cover up an order he gave to shell a company of his own men when they refused to advance in a suicidal assault of an enemy position. They are put on trial for their lives, to be made an example of the consequences of "cowardice in the face of the enemy." Mireau acts with the support of the equally calculating General Georges Broulard (Adolphe Menjou), and the altruistic Colonel Dax (Kirk Douglas) takes it upon himself to defend the men in court.

Why did *Paths of Glory* turn to the First World War, rather than the cinematically ubiquitous Second, to argue its anti-war point? Niemi is right to assert the greater complexity as well as higher casualty rate of the later conflict, but there is one key exception to his claim that it overwhelmed the earlier war in *every* way. The perception of Nazi Germany and its allies as profoundly evil, powerfully represented in the public consciousness by Hitler and – once its full, horrific extent was revealed – the Holocaust, was an emblem for the justness of the war. This was 'the last good war,' one that 'had to be fought and won ... an unambiguous struggle between good and evil'¹⁶; its principals – Churchill, Roosevelt, Marshall, Eisenhower – hailed as robust and righteous guardians of liberty. The First World War had no such emblem, its foundations a convoluted miscellany of territorial disputes, arms races, and political and economic rivalries that, for most, could not justify the four years of tragic, often fruitless mass carnage in the trenches.¹⁷ Of its generals, Andrew Kelly notes, '[f]ew speak well ... popularly

¹⁶ Bruce W. Nelan, '1939-1948 War: The Last Good War', *Time* (9 March 1998). A 2004 Gallup poll showed that 90% of Americans characterised World War II as a "just" war, as opposed to, for example, 33% that said the same of the Vietnam War. Frank Newport, 'Almost All Americans Consider World War II a "Just" War', *Gallup* (3 June 2004) <www.gallup.com/poll/11881/almost-all-americans-consider-world-war-just-war.aspx>.

¹⁷ David Stevenson, *The Outbreak of the First World War: 1914 in Perspective* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1997), 1.

seen as spectators rather than fighters, well-fed and luxuriously housed, they demanded the impossible and seemed ready to accept massive losses for minor gain. It is little wonder that such epithets as “blimps” and “donkeys” have been levelled at them.’¹⁸ It is exactly this sense of horror, futility, and injustice, central to the characterisation of the war itself, with which the pacifist critique of Kubrick’s film is fundamentally concerned.

The passage quoted above introduces Kelly’s treatise on *Paths of Glory*, which delineates the central role of the military hierarchy in the delivery of pacifist themes and depiction of the war in what David Ehrenstein calls ‘all its cruel, almost laughably absurd logic.’¹⁹ The central antagonist of Kubrick’s film is less blimp or donkey and more archetypal movie villain: the malevolent and ruthless Mireau, with his prominent facial scar and goatee, grand headquarters at an imposing French *château* (Figure 9) – where he dines in antique luxury as his men suffer and die at the front – and manner of reclining unconcernedly on a sofa as the farcical court-martial that he ordered puts three innocent men to death. Among the many actions through which the film establishes Mireau as a heartless antagonist – besides, for example, his willingness to put his shattered and depleted forces through an almost impossible attack on a strategic position when tempted with a promotion, reducing them to statistics (“Say, five percent killed by our own barrage. That’s a very generous allowance”), or his order to shell his own men when they fail to advance – is through his attitude to mental strain and the reaction of men to the stress of combat. In an early scene a tracking shot follows the calm and neatly dressed (that is to say, not battle-worn) Mireau as he strides through the trenches in the immaculate ornamental garb of the military elite, as if he carries the opulence of his distant *château* headquarters, draped over his shoulders, as a shield against the fear and exhaustion of the soldiers. Their lack of reaction to the constant shell impacts, which startle the general, betray the regularity of the event. One of the men he stops to greet, a Private, wears an unblinking stare; he cannot make eye contact with Mireau. The camera moves into a close-up

¹⁸ Andrew Kelly, ‘The Brutality of Military Incompetence: ‘Paths of Glory’ (1957)’, *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, 13:2 (1993), 215.

¹⁹ David Ehrenstein, ‘Paths of Glory,’ *The Criterion Collection* (25 June 1989) <www.criterion.com/current/posts/812-paths-of-glory>.



Fig. 9. Left: The villain's lair – Mireau's opulent headquarters.
Right: Interior and the archetypally villainous General himself.

to accentuate the suffering etched into his features. He has a wife, but he's "never going to see her again, I'm going to be killed." The man is "a bit shell-shocked," says his sergeant, but according to Mireau, there is no such thing: he is just a coward, a "baby," who must immediately be removed from the regiment lest he "contaminate" his comrades. Between them, the General and his *aide-de-camp*, Major Saint-Auban (Richard Anderson), refer to all three of the common characterisations of the shell-shocked man – as infantilised (Mireau calls the traumatised soldier a "baby," above), feminised ("If a man's a ninny, let him put on a dress and hide under the bed"), and bestial or inhuman ("they get in a tight spot under heavy fire, gang up every time ... herd instinct I suppose, kind of a lower animal sort of thing"). This dismissal of shell shock was prevalent, as we have seen, among those higher in the military hierarchy, especially in the early years of the war. It is exaggerated here, exploited as one facet of the film's wider depiction of a 'gulf between leaders and led' around which its indictment of war is structured.²⁰

As Philip Kuberski suggests, the central conflict of *Paths of Glory* is not between the French and the Germans but 'between the State's Commissioned Officers and the "men" drafted or recruited from the "masses," between the ahistorical abstractions of "France" and "Glory" and the existential fact of human bodies and death.'²¹ Equally central in the film's manifestation of this conflict is its centrepiece, the court-martial of the three innocent men –

²⁰ Gavin Lambert, 'Paths of Glory', *Sight & Sound*, 27:3 (1957), 144.

²¹ Philip Kuberski, *Kubrick's Total Cinema: Philosophical Themes and Formal Qualities* (London; New York: Continuum, 2012), 63.

Corporal Paris and Privates Arnaud and Ferol. The inevitable guilty verdict and the soldiers' execution in the film's climax is the culmination of a series of instances in which Kubrick sharply portrays the cruelty and immorality of which the high command is capable. The theme of war's psychological traumas – and the variations in men's responses to it – again emerges in the context of the trial to substantiate Kuberski's characterisation of this conflict as a war, 'waged by the State against its own citizens.'²² The language that Dax uses when preparing his defendants evokes the comparison: it is a "trial for their lives" in which they must "act like brave soldiers." Even more telling are their reactions to the guilty verdict; to what amounts to their staring of death in the face much like they would in going over the top and charging into the enemy's bullets. Each prisoner exhibits a distinct psychological reaction to this fear, examples of which we can find – indeed, have found – in the historical evidence and filmic representations of shell shock discussed in this thesis. Arnaud turns to alcohol (recalling Stanhope in *Journey's End*) in an attempt to control his terror and anger; Ferol breaks down into hysterical sobbing; Paris, whose initial reaction is similar to Ferol's, regains his composure enough to face the firing squad with manly stoicism.

Elisabeth Bronfen explains that the corruption and inhumanity of the film's generals is rooted not, as Kelly and Guy Westwell claim, in incompetence and weakness, but in calculated ambition; in the political nature of the military hierarchy – both Broulard and Mireau act as they do because they stand to gain or maintain power 'within a political culture sustained by military conflict' – Mireau because he is offered promotion, and to cover up his illegal order.²³ Broulard is so ensnared in the politics of military authority that he assumes Dax's noble defence of the accused men is only in service of his career advancement. 'The political power struggle at military headquarters,' then, 'will continue to be fought out on the front line,' with the cold sacrifice of innocent men.²⁴ This, Bronfen argues, 'implicitly [gestures] to the perpetual Cold War subtending America at the time [the film] was released,' which suggests that *Paths of Glory*

²² *Ibid*, 65.

²³ Kelly, 'Brutality of Military Incompetence'; Guy Westwell, *War Cinema: Hollywood on the Front Line* (London; New York: Wallflower, 2006), 53; Elisabeth Bronfen, *Specters of War: Hollywood's Engagement with Military Conflict* (New Brunswick, NJ; London: Rutgers University Press, 2012), 176.

²⁴ Bronfen, *Specters of War*, 176.

‘reflects as much on the enmeshment of military and politics at the time the film was made as on the fubar of World War I.’²⁵ Although the Korean War ended four years beforehand, Kubrick’s film, along with a cycle of war films made in the late 1940s and 1950s, would ‘register the changed circumstances and cynicism instilled by the experience.’²⁶ In Korea, the United States set a precedent for military involvement in foreign theatres in the name of the curtailment of communism, sending troops to die in battles for an ideological, political war, and would do so again, less than a decade later, in Vietnam. Much like Broulard and Mireau, American politicians stood to gain from a strong patriotic rhetoric and aggressive stance towards the enemy, by aligning themselves with popular feeling, and were willing to sacrifice the necessary bodies, sourced from the “masses,” to make these military, and therefore personal and political, gains.²⁷ The ‘abstractions of “France” and “Glory”’ to which Kuberski refers might just as well be “America” and “Freedom.” Finally, the court-martial at the heart of the film – the “war” of the State upon its own men – finds a Cold War analogue in McCarthyism and the actions of the House Un-American Activities Committee, a similarly internal war waged by Americans on Americans, taking advantage of the Red Scare to put on trial alleged communist sympathisers, which famously blacklisted Hollywood professionals until 1960.

Although it is set within the French military, the claim that the primary motive of *Paths of Glory* was its condemnation of the same (the French were ‘particularly incensed,’ Niemi writes, at what they saw ‘as a mockery of the French Army at its most sensitive time – when France was in the midst of an unpopular colonial war in Algeria’²⁸) could not be further from the truth. Kubrick was centrally concerned with the state of his own nation in a global context, as evidenced by the more explicit representations of Cold War-era concerns in his later films, *Dr. Strangelove* (1964) and *Full Metal Jacket*, as part of a more universal pacifist missive. The distance that it established from its American context – its setting in a war of an ever more

²⁵ *Ibid*, 176, 169.

²⁶ Westwell, *War Cinema*, 53.

²⁷ The Truman Doctrine is a good example of this rhetoric (see fn. 4).

²⁸ Niemi, *Inspired by True Events*, 65.

distant past, in a foreign military, as well as its independence from the ideological constraints of Hollywood, is what allowed for what Westwell calls its ‘unbridled critical bite.’²⁹

A complex fusion of political and social circumstance and realities of national character prevented the First World War, and its emblematic disorder, from finding much representation in the American cinema of the long and gruelling Cold War period – with Kubrick’s film amongst the few meaningful exceptions. What, though, of their transatlantic cousins? Though Britain’s involvement in the Cold War was relatively small, its cinema shows a similar unwillingness, in its early decades, to make a subject of shell shock and the Great War. It is not until the 1960s, around its fiftieth anniversary, that the debate about the war slowly begins to reopen and reflections on its psychological impact – as the following chapter will show – are allowed to filter in to its filmic depictions.

²⁹ Westwell, *War Cinema*, 54.

Remembrance, Rediscovery, *Regeneration*: British cinema, 1945-1997

In post-war Britain, as in America, the Second World War quickly came to overshadow the First. In the latter half of the 1940s and throughout the 1950s, the national cinema reflected the public preoccupation with the most recent war. It did so, as Alan Burton has explained, in a way that endorsed the view of the war against fascism as a heroic and very necessary enterprise in which, as the previous chapter has shown, ‘fundamental values of civilisation’ were believed to be under threat.¹ Films that ‘stressed the quiet heroism’ of the British Armed Forces would prove to be some of the period’s most popular.² In the shadow of this great moral victory that, as Churchill predicted it would be, broadly came to be seen as Britain’s “finest hour” – as well as the ‘increasingly uncertain future’ that the nation faced – ‘film-makers became almost obsessed with the Second World War ... 1914-1918, often seen as the beginning of national decline, was painful to recall and thus ignored by British cinema.’³

This was all soon to change, however. Diverging from American cinema, whose unwillingness to represent World War I in realistic detail stretched, as we have seen, throughout the Cold War period, critics have noted that the scholarly debate about the Great War was reopened in Britain beginning at around the same time as the fiftieth anniversary of its outbreak in 1964. This coincided with a renewed and reinvigorated public and cinematic awareness of the conflict.⁴ The BBC and Imperial War Museum’s mammoth twenty-six-part television documentary *The Great War* was released in the semicentennial year of the outbreak in 1964, and narrative films dealing explicitly with the conflict also began to emerge in the 1960s and into the 1970s: David Lean’s best picture-winning epic *Lawrence of Arabia* in 1962; Joseph

¹ Burton, ‘Death or glory?’, 35.

² *Ibid.* Burton cites *The Cruel Sea* (Charles Frend, 1953) and Michael Anderson’s *The Dam Busters* (1954) as particularly pertinent examples.

³ Paris, ‘Enduring Heroes’, 66. On this ‘increasingly uncertain future,’ Paris notes a post-1945 Britain ‘plagued by economic crisis, the problems of decolonisation and the loss of great-power status’ (66).

⁴ See *ibid.*; Alex Danchev, “Bunking’ and Debunking: The Controversies of the 1960s’, in Bond, B. (ed.), *The First World War and British Military History* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 263-4.

Losey's *King & Country* in 1964; *The Blue Max* (John Guillermin), set in the Air Force, in 1966; Richard Attenborough's satirical musical *Oh! What a Lovely War* in 1969; Alan Bridges' *The Hireling* in 1973; Étienne Périer's *Zeppelin* and Roger Corman's *Von Richthofen and Brown* in 1971; Jack Gold's *Aces High*, which reimagined *Journey's End* in the setting of the Royal Flying Corps, in 1976. Many of these films continue the tradition of earlier British films in focussing on the war's 'psychological impacts and personal dramas rather than the direct physical experience of combat in the trenches.'⁵ This, along with, as James Chapman notes, the advent of auteurism and new wave cinemas around Europe that 'brought a more irreverent and cynical attitude towards cherished national myths and popular narratives of the past,' formed a cinematic framework within which critical perspectives on the war – and the emblem of its suffering, shell shock – could flourish.⁶ The first part of this chapter looks at *King & Country*, a film in which it does just that. The second part deals with a group of films that, in the last two decades of the twentieth century, appeared in a second wave of British films dealing with World War I. These, unlike those mentioned above, seemed to respond not to the memory of the war itself, but to its fundamental themes that were reflected in the rapidly and significantly shifting social landscape of modern Britain.

King & Country, simply put, is Britain's answer to *Paths of Glory*. Several critics have drawn comparisons between Kubrick's film and Losey's, including James Palmer and Michael Riley, who note the shared elements of an unjust court-martial of a common soldier; the officer who tries, and fails, to defend them in a trial with only one possible outcome; the political motivation of the decision, and 'the rationale for the verdicts [being] that the executions will provide a salutary example for the condemned's fellow soldiers.'⁷ In both, as Chapman claims, 'the real war is a class war,' but *King & Country* draws specific attention, as perhaps only a British film could, to *social* class, as opposed to military status.⁸ In this case, the man on trial for his life is

⁵ Claire Monk & Amy Sargeant, 'Introduction: The past in British cinema', in Monk & Sargeant (eds.), *British Historical Cinema*, 5.

⁶ Chapman, *War and Film*, 131.

⁷ James Palmer & Michael Riley, *The Films of Joseph Losey* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 20.

⁸ Chapman, *War and Film*, 134.

the working class cobbler Private Arthur Hamp (Tom Courtenay), a volunteer who, unable to stand the pressures of combat, decides to “go for a walk” home to London. He is caught on the way and charged with desertion, and Captain Hargreaves (Dirk Bogarde) is assigned to defend him. Losey’s style paints a picture of trench life that is as grim – perhaps more so – than any of the bleakest portraits of the war that came before it. Denys Coop’s gloomy black and white cinematography and Larry Adler’s austere, elegiac score help to create a haunting and suffocating atmosphere to surround the images of death and desolation. In the opening sequence, Burton notes, the film ‘juxtaposes details of monuments memorialising the dead of the Great War ... [with] documentary photographs of the carnage ... it becomes clear that the intent is not honorific but ironic and belongs to an anti-monumentalising tradition: what is being depicted is brutal, not noble.’ One of these photographs, Burton continues – of a skeletal corpse lying face-up in the mud – cuts to a ‘compositionally similar’ shot of Hamp, which ‘unambiguously signals [his] eventual fate.’⁹ The film returns, repeatedly, to this harsh juxtaposition between the myths that surrounded the war and the actual experience of it: between the cheerful Tommies who believed a quick and leisurely victory would see them home in time for Christmas and the four horrific years of battle that transpired, and, most importantly here, between the immovable demands of manly conduct and patriotic bravery (ironically embodied by the film’s titular exhortation) and the circumstances, richly portrayed to the audience, in which these virtues proved unattainable. This manly doctrine is aimed at Hamp – a proxy for the many men who experienced a similar fate – from all angles. It extends first from the military, of course, but also from the home front: early on the film cuts to two dreamlike snapshots, as if imagined or only distantly remembered. The first is of Hamp’s young son, to whom Hamp must feel a paternal responsibility to survive, both mentally and physically. The second is of a wall emblazoned with graffiti reading “Women of Britain Say Go,” echoing the plea of a propaganda poster mentioned in chapter two.¹⁰ All of the stylistic and narrative qualities described above: the atmosphere of the trenches in which trauma seems embedded,

⁹ Burton, ‘Death or glory?’, 35, 36.

¹⁰ See chapter two, fn. 25.

the cuts to non-diegetic images – including to the dead soldier, the desolation of the landscape, and Hamp's soon to be fatherless son – work to predispose the audience to sympathy for Hamp's plight, even before we learn the details of the mental trauma that led him to act as he did.

The principal difference, as Palmer and Riley explain, between this film and *Paths of Glory* is that the experience of Hargreaves, as compared to that of Colonel Dax, involves a 'moral change' that, by design, is an impossibility in Kubrick's film.¹¹ Dax is never anything but staunchly moral, and by the end of the film '[he] has spoken for humane values, but he cannot make any difference;' this absolute, obstinate corruption of its generals is the fundamental source of the film's anger.¹² Hargreaves, on the other hand, does change. In failing to defend Hamp, he, too, 'proves unable to change the course of the public world he lives in. But there is still a private world of conscience and choice that is not beyond reach, and that is the film's principal arena.'¹³ Attitudes towards shell shock are central in this arena, and to Hargreaves' moral journey.

The stark differences between the two men are quickly established. It initially appears that Hargreaves is just another "donkey," a shell shock-denying, upper-class officer who looks upon the accused man with contempt. Being on trial for his life "doesn't make him [Hamp] original," because, he says, "we're all on trial for our lives. The only thing that makes him original is that he's failed as a man and a soldier." Burton stresses the importance of language 'as a crucial mechanism for marking class distinctions ... the inarticulate Private Hamp nominates Captain Hargreaves to speak for him at the trial because of his inability to express himself adequately.'¹⁴ This is not the only means by which they are divided along class lines, however: In their first meeting, in Hamp's squalid makeshift cell, we learn that the Private is uneducated, having left school at twelve to become a bootmaker; and the two men's accents, along with the differences in their vernacular, are stereotypical of their class positions. Hamp

¹¹ Palmer & Riley, *The Films of Joseph Losey*, 20.

¹² *Ibid.*, 21.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Burton, 'Death or glory?', 40-1.

assumes that these class boundaries have been broken down by his circumstances; that such military formalities as standing to attention for an officer would be made trivial by the direness of his situation, perhaps because, despite his self-consoling affirmations that “it’ll come out alright,” he knows, like the audience, that he is as good as dead. Hargreaves swiftly corrects him. His demand of Hamp to “pull yourself together” reminds us of the appeals to a stiff-upper-lip and unsympathetic attitudes associated with the officer class and high command. These figures do exist in the film, with, as Palmer and Riley put it, ‘fools and knaves enough to go around.’¹⁵ Hargreaves, however, proves not to be one of them: as Burton asserts, ‘he comes to form a more complex appreciation of duty, one that embraces a responsibility to traumatised soldiers like Hamp.’¹⁶

The captain looks for an “understandable reason” for Hamp’s desertion and “cowardice.” Was shell shock the cause? This is what Hargreaves argues to the court-martial, who in various ways run the gamut of the clichéd, uncaring or ignorant reactions of the non-combatant officer towards the shell-shocked regular soldier. Is Hamp a “lunatic”? “Mentally deficient”? Just “unhappy” or “stupid”? The court calls the blustering Captain O’Sullivan (Leo McKern), the doctor who treated Hamp, to give evidence. We discover that after just a five to ten minute interview he prescribed laxatives, as he does as a matter of course to men who complain of “nerves,” refusing to believe that there is anything seriously wrong with them, because, he says, “I haven’t got time for emotional problems.” Hamp was simply in need of discipline, like some lower form of life – a child or an animal – and a man-to-man talk. He uses that standard directive of the blimpish British authority figure, “pull yourself together,” and after some probing he admits he thinks of shell-shocked men as little more than cowards.

Hargreaves, then, must overcome these firmly entrenched expectations – of manliness and commitment to duty, honour and sacrifice “for king and country,” outmoded by the brutality of the war – and consequent ignorance and heartlessness towards psychological trauma in ordinary soldiers to convince the court that shell shock was indeed an

¹⁵ Palmer & Riley, *The Films of Joseph Losey*, 20.

¹⁶ Burton, ‘Death or glory?’, 36.

“understandable reason” for Hamp’s actions. The evidence he provides is convincing – the accused suffered gaps in memory and trouble sleeping, saw a man “blown to bits” and was showered in his remains, and very nearly drowned in a water-logged shell hole, all on top of the relentless general strain of trench life. “A man can only take so much,” Hargreaves pleads. We know that any impartial verdict would read not guilty, but we also know that the captain’s efforts will inevitably be in vain, for the callousness and inhumanity of the military’s upper echelons is the film’s central theme. His impassioned closing speech, in which he appeals to the court’s ‘moral duty to express justice if not to pronounce the law in the case,’ is ignored: ‘The Colonel presiding ... casually dismisses this reasoning as a “matter of opinion”. For the officers of the Court Martial, the trial is nothing more than a technical legal procedure in which Hargreaves’s moral and humanitarian concerns have no place.’¹⁷ Hamp is found guilty and sentenced to die by firing squad; when most of them miss, it falls to Hargreaves to deliver the killing blow. As Burton sees it:

In his plea for justice, Hargreaves argues for the State’s responsibility for the enlisted soldier who, like numerous real-life Britons, has volunteered his life for the national cause ... In return, Hamp is shown to have been treated with contempt by a powerful class who show little regard for the ordinary soldier’s horrific experience of the front line but are prepared to dispense with those who ‘fail’ in their duty in the belief that this will improve general morale. Hargreaves in effect questions this evacuation of responsibility by the officer class, arguing that one of their duties is to show compassion towards men such as Hamp who served loyally until fatigue or terror overcame them.¹⁸

His execution, then, is the culmination of the film’s indictment of the officer class, of the misunderstanding of or plain disregard for war trauma preordained by their class prejudices.

The beginning of the 1980s saw the rise to power of two new world leaders who, though similar ideologically and in political character, would exert very different influences over the state of masculinity in their respective nations. In America, the “Reagan Revolution” saw American machismo hit a peak on the international political stage, disseminating ‘narratives of heroism,

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 37.

success, achievement, toughness, strength, and “good old Americanness” typified by the president’s own macho image.¹⁹ Throughout his presidency, correspondingly, Hollywood was preoccupied with a dominant image of ‘hard-bodied’ masculinity that continued to preclude much representation of the defeated, introspective, and traumatised man. On the other side of the Atlantic, however, an entirely different narrative was playing out. Thatcher’s “revolution,” in stark contrast to that of her American counterpart, marginalised and disempowered working-class men ‘with its shift from a manufacturing to a service economy and concomitant high levels of unemployment.’²⁰ This was fertile ground, of course, for stories of impotent or threatened masculinity, and British films of the 1980s – as well as the 1990s, a period when the fallout of the previous decade was powerfully felt, both socially and cinematically – happily obliged.²¹

At the same time, the lessons of Vietnam had precipitated a widespread ‘rediscovery of trauma’ starting in the late 1970s, centred around the admission of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder to the third edition (1980) of the American Psychiatric Association’s *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual*.²² Its inclusion, Shephard notes, both standardised the diagnostic and therapeutic methods of responding to the disorder, and gave it an ‘authority’ that helped ‘finally to reverse decades of wilful ignorance of traumatic acts and denial of post-traumatic suffering.’ ‘PTSD spread round the world very quickly,’ he continues, ‘its adoption in Britain hastened by the 1982 Falklands War and the spate of man-made disasters in the later years of Margaret Thatcher’s premiership.’²³ The concept of trauma quickly took hold in all aspects of British life,

¹⁹ Jeffords, *Hard Bodies*, 15.

²⁰ Andrew Spicer, *Typical Men: The Representation of Masculinity in Popular British Cinema* (London; New York: I. B. Tauris, 2001), 188.

²¹ For an account of these films, see John Hill, *British Cinema in the 1980s: Issues and Themes* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), 166-191; Claire Monk, ‘Men in the 90s’, in Murphy, R. (ed.), *British Cinema of the 90s* (London: BFI, 2000).

²² Bessel van der Kolk, ‘Posttraumatic stress disorder and the nature of trauma’, *Dialogues in Clinical Neuroscience*, 2:1 (2000), 12; Shephard, *A War of Nerves*, 385; American Psychiatric Association, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, 3rd ed. (Washington, DC, 1980), 236-8.

²³ Shephard, *A War of Nerves*, 385, 386.

from the medical profession to the law to academia; and the public, of course – via the media – resulting in what Shephard has called the ‘counselling culture’ of the 1990s.²⁴

These two, concurrent, aspects of British life in the eighties and nineties represent a reflection, and convergence, of two themes – of masculinity and psychology – that also happened to be essential to the understanding of the First World War: the psychological ordeals experienced by its soldiers and the damage to their sense of masculinity that they suffered as a result. It comes as little surprise to discover, then, a second wave of renewed interest in both big- and small-screen renderings of the Great War and, often, the internal plight of its men. There were, for example, BBC television adaptations of Vera Brittain’s *Testament of Youth* (1979), R. F. Delderfield’s *To Serve Them All My Days* (1980-81), Virginia Woolf’s *To the Lighthouse* (1983), and Sherriff’s *Journey’s End* (1988). The fourth and final series of the BBC period sitcom *Blackadder* (1983-89), *Blackadder Goes Forth*, was set in the trenches of Flanders, with the final episode centring on the titular protagonist’s attempts to evade having to go over the top by feigning insanity. There was also the television films *A Dangerous Man* (Christopher Menaul, 1992) – a sequel to *Lawrence of Arabia* – and *The Unknown Soldier* (David Drury, 1998), along with a number of theatrical releases, including the Welsh language *Hedd Wyn* (Paul Turner, 1992). The remainder of this chapter looks at three of the richest representations of shell shock in the period: two adaptations, firstly, of classic Great War literature, namely Rebecca West’s *The Return of the Soldier* (Alan Bridges, 1982, from the 1918 novel) and Woolf’s *Mrs Dalloway* (Marleen Gorris, 1997, from the novel of 1925). There was also a major contemporary novel, Pat Barker’s *Regeneration* (1991, the first of a trilogy also including *The Eye in the Door* [1993] and *The Ghost Road* [1995]), which took shell shock and the some of its principal historical figures – the war poets Siegfried Sassoon and Wilfred Owen, and the psychologists W. H. R. Rivers and Lewis Yealland – as its narrative subject. The Scottish filmmaker Gillies MacKinnon was quick to see its cinematic potential, and his film adaptation, of the same name, was released in 1997. Their appearance prompted, perhaps, by the example set by those films produced at the time of the war’s anniversary, these later ventures into the

²⁴ *Ibid*, xx, 386-7.

filmic Great War share their focus on its ‘psychological impacts and personal dramas,’ and also their central concern with class and masculinity as a way of structuring their representations of the war, its soldiers, shell shock and the methods with which it was treated by doctors and psychiatrists.

King & Country challenged the class prejudices of previous British shell shock films like *Journey’s End* and *Woman to Woman*, recognising that the war neuroses was not the exclusive domain of the officer class and shedding light on the psychological plight of the working class Tommy. *The Return of the Soldier*, in focusing almost solely on the English aristocracy and the traumatic plight of a British officer, represents something of a step back from this new mode. There are two reasons why it was possible for the film to take this rather outdated approach without courting much significant criticism for its lack of real representation of the lower classes. The novel from which it is adapted, firstly, was written in the final year of the war, when these class differences were still very much embedded in the conventional understanding of traumatic neuroses. Although, as we will see, it was progressive for its time, it could be forgiven for following the accepted view of a complex medical issue. Secondly, with Thatcher just three years into her premiership when the film appeared in 1982, the most significant instances of British working-class disempowerment in this period were still to come.

It would be possible to read *The Return of the Soldier* within the context of a major critical cycle – the heritage film – that was taking hold in British cinema at this time thanks to a booming heritage industry and interest in national history.²⁵ Certainly, in its narrow focus on the social elite of a traditional past, and handsome exhibition of an upper-class Edwardian Britain (the iconography of the stately country home, its antique decoration and pastoral surroundings; the trappings of costume; stereotypically aristocratic accents and manners) it could be said to fit with this group of films that, ‘[b]y turning their backs on the industrialized, chaotic present,’ as Andrew Higson writes, ‘nostalgically reconstruct an imperialist and upper-

²⁵ Hill, *British Cinema in the 1980s*, 73.

class Britain.’²⁶ A far more stimulating discussion, however, situates its contributions to the debates surrounding class, masculinity, shell shock and psychoanalysis within the context of the nascent rediscovery of trauma and psychiatry in British society.

In its original, literary form, *The Return of the Soldier* is West’s insightful and impassioned cry of anguish at watching the catastrophe of the First World War ‘rupture the environment of her youth irreparably.’²⁷ It also, Showalter contends, ‘goes well beyond even the enlightenment of [W. H. R.] Rivers in grasping the connections between male hysteria and a whole range of male social obligations.’²⁸ On the level of narrative, the film version is faithful to the events of the story, which concerns the Baldry family patriarch, Chris (Alan Bates), whose memory of his wife Kitty (Julie Christie) is lost to the shell shock he suffers during his service on the western front. Upon his return, his trauma manifests as a regression to a childish state. His “hysterical fugue” (amnesia) liberates him from the duties of manly behaviour dictated by his class background, of restraint, decorum and respectability; ‘he finds refuge from all the suffocating male roles of his life: Tory landowner, dutiful husband, brave officer.’²⁹ He is granted the freedom of emotional immaturity – he plays football with schoolchildren, spends time boating on the pond near the house, and rekindles his adolescent romance with Margaret Grey (Glenda Jackson, to whom Chris refers by her maiden name, Allington), who represents a return to a period of innocence and independence in her working-class humility – an antidote to the restrictive upper-class propriety represented by Kitty. Although, as I alluded to earlier, the film was made before the worst of the Thatcher government’s marginalisation of the lesser classes, choosing to adapt a narrative that interprets the working class milieu as a site of playful, carefree innocence, autonomy, and healing when they did does betray a certain lack of

²⁶ Andrew Higson, ‘Re-presenting the National Past: Nostalgia and Pastiche in the Heritage Film’, in Friedman, L. (ed.), *British Cinema and Thatcherism: Fires Were Started* (London: UCL Press, 1993), 110. For a summary of the heritage film debate, see Andrew Higson, ‘The Heritage Film and British Cinema’, in Higson, A. (ed.), *Dissolving Views: Key Writings on British Cinema* (London: Cassell, 1996).

²⁷ Sadie Jones, afterword to Rebecca West, *The Return of the Soldier* (London: Virago, 2010; first published 1918), 142.

²⁸ Showalter, *The Female Malady*, 191.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

sensitivity to a contemporary context in which discontent among the working classes and, as Andrew Spicer put it, the disempowerment of the underclass male, was noticeably building.³⁰

The Return of the Soldier, after a host of legal complications, finally hit American screens in 1985. Steve Vineberg, reviewing the film for the *Threepenny Review*, was impressed that it did not pretend that it was not ‘a relic of an earlier age.’³¹ It was a ‘safe, comfortable experience’ in its perceived lack of connection to the 1980s Britain in which it was made, a simple and beautiful reconstruction of the trappings of Edwardian Britain with ‘no attempt to contemporize West’s story.’³² When it was published (in 1918, as the fighting still raged) and in the ensuing post-war period, the themes that it tackled were both painfully relevant to and resonant among a society that was dealing with much the same crises as the fictional characters it portrays. Seeing it adapted for the screen more than six decades later, it is understandable that it felt disconnected with its cultural milieu. What Vineberg failed to recognise was the connection between the interest in adapting West’s shell shock narrative, principally concerned with the gendered implications of the disorder and the methods used in treating it, and the burgeoning obsession with trauma and recovery around the world – especially, as I noted earlier, in Britain – around this time.

The representation of Chris’ treatment and recovery, then, is crucial. In contrast to many narratives of shell shock, here the condition is portrayed as fixable – quite easily so, in fact: the enquiries of a psychoanalyst, Dr. Anderson (Ian Holm) arrive at the conclusion that Chris can be cured and his memory restored if he is reminded of the death of his young son. This is a simplistic, almost fantastical view, but one that speaks to a heightened sense of faith in psychotherapeutic methods in treating trauma. But this sense of optimism about the treatability of disorder and the reintegration of its sufferers into society is contradicted by the inevitable emergence of West’s historical perspective. We are presented with a moral dilemma that plays out during the film’s denouement: if ‘Chris is happy in his delusion,’ as Jessica Meyer

³⁰ Spicer, *Typical Men*, 188.

³¹ Steve Vineberg, ‘Surface and Depth’, *The Threepenny Review*, 23 (1985), 23.

³² *Ibid.*

claims he is, and protected by it from the ‘dangers of war,’ then why cure him, especially in such callous fashion?³³ The women around him

feel that they must cherish his rational masculinity ... The return of the soldier (he’s “every inch a soldier” after the cure) is the return of the male automaton. The cure has replaced passion with a “dreadful decent smile,” and protective affection with the yoke of an unwanted embrace. Worst of all, it condemns Baldry not only to his loveless marriage but also to return to “that flooded trench in Flanders ... that No Man’s Land where bullets fall like rain on the rotting faces of the dead.”³⁴

The answer lies, then, in the unacceptability of his transgression of masculine norms – ‘obviously,’ observes Showalter, ‘his family and his society cannot allow him to remain in this private retreat’³⁵ – and necessity, in a time of war, to return him to fighting fitness. The film takes a bleak view of this, presenting his swift cure and return to “normalcy” in extreme wide angles; as an audience we are physically removed from the moment, as if to say that to present it too intimately would be to vindicate the act.

Mrs Dalloway, like the 1925 Virginia Woolf novel from which it is adapted, foregrounds shell shock in its narrative treatment of the lingering after-effects of the First World War, and speaks to debates about therapy and trauma. We are introduced to the titular character, Clarissa Dalloway (Vanessa Redgrave), the affluent wife of a government official, on a sun-drenched London day in 1923. As she is buying flowers in preparation for the party she is to host that night, she is startled by the sound of a car backfiring, which slowly transforms, non-diegetically, into sounds of gunfire and explosions, and she notices a man standing outside the shop, stricken and apparently panicked by the sound. Although they do not know each other, and their stories do not explicitly converge until its closing scenes, the film will follow the parallel stories of these two, wholly disparate, characters throughout. The man is Septimus Warren Smith (Rupert Graves), a decorated war veteran suffering from delayed-onset shell shock. We

³³ Meyer, ‘Separating the Men from the Boys’, 17.

³⁴ Showalter, *The Female Malady*, 191. Quoted passages from Rebecca West, *The Return of the Soldier* (London: Virago, 1979), 150, 183, 187.

³⁵ Showalter, *The Female Malady*, 191.

learn of the romantic entanglements of Mrs Dalloway through a series of flashbacks depicting her privileged youth in rural England in the late 19th century.

The film presents two very distinct worlds, the contrasts between which lay bare the social upheaval that took place in Britain in the period around the *fin de siècle*. The first is that of Clarissa Dalloway's youth, which offers plentiful visual and performative pleasures: the grand country house in a rural English landscape; the fashion and other trappings of the setting; and the etiquettes, language, accents, and lifestyles of the British upper-classes. It is very aware, however, that the long-stable norms and customs of this period are in their twilight. The characters Peter Walsh (Alan Cox) and Sally Seaton (Lena Headey) frequently mock the snobbery and prudishness of their class; the latter expresses a transgressive feminism through her assertion that she and Clarissa will "change the world," her views on marriage ("marriage is a catastrophe for women") and rejection of the stigma of sex (and procreation) before marriage, and, when she shares a kiss with the young Clarissa, she embodies a subversion of conventional sexuality. These moments also anticipate the period of cultural modernisation that led up to and came to a head with the First World War. In the second world, the London of 1923, the wounds of the conflict remain ever-present: the camera lingers, for example, on a leg amputee in soldierly attire as Clarissa walks through the city. If the rurality of Clarissa's memories is positioned as a site of (albeit, wavering) stability, then, the urban space of her present establishes itself as the site of anxiety and trauma. The ordinary sights of civilisation and modernity take on a more threatening character – as when Clarissa and Septimus are startled by the car backfire.

As we saw in the introduction, issues of gender and sexuality were fundamental aspects of the turmoil of this period and, post-war, shell shock became a defining feature of the discourse surrounding them. These issues are the focal point of Woolf's depiction of Smith and his affliction and, although it is a condensed version, the film manages to capture its ideological essence. Smith's narrative arc brings together Woolf's own experiences with psychological disorder – all five of her doctors, several of whom went on to be involved with the treatment of

shell shock, were unable to alleviate the neurasthenia she battled for much of her life³⁶ – and her unusually detailed knowledge of war neuroses – she knew Siegfried Sassoon and was familiar with, for instance, ‘his experience with hallucinating dead bodies on the streets of London.’³⁷ As a result, the depiction of Smith’s symptoms is more nuanced; of the methods and implicit gendered prejudices of his psychiatrists, it is deeply critical. As Showalter observes, Smith ‘perhaps owes something of his name, his appearance, and his war experience’ to the poet – both, of course, have the initials S. S., and Sassoon’s battlefield torments are projected quite literally onto his fictional namesake, who talks to his dead friend, Evans, and hallucinates him being blown up while in a London park.³⁸

It is the expectation of manly stoicism that, yet again, lies at the root of Smith’s trauma, a fact of which Woolf was acutely aware. In the character of Smith, she ‘[connects] the shell-shocked veteran with the repressed woman of the man-governed world through their common enemy, the nerve specialist ... Woolf perceived and exposed the sadism of nerve therapies that enforced conventional sex roles.’³⁹ The role assigned to Smith via his gender dictates that he must be numb to the horrors through which he lived, but ‘the more he struggles to repress his war experience, the more hideously it rises up to haunt him.’⁴⁰ To grieve, or indeed to feel in any way, was to be feminine; a failure of masculinity that he describes as his “sins” and “crimes” for which he is “on trial.” His doctors are as condescending towards his plight as those who, when it first appeared, dismissed shell shock as the refuge of cowards and malingerers: the “repulsive brute” Dr. Holmes, who prescribed Smith porridge and a new hobby, insisting that his mental wellness is a matter of his own self-control, ‘tries to deal with Septimus’s anguish by forcing him into the rigid mould of middle-class English masculine conduct.’⁴¹ Bradshaw, a psychiatrist, is more perceptive but nevertheless cold and obstinate in his insistence that Smith should be committed to a home for “complete rest” and separated from his wife. For Septimus,

³⁶ Maxwell Bennett, *Virginia Woolf and Neuropsychiatry* (New York; London: Springer, 2013), 9.

³⁷ Church, ‘Literary Representations of Shell Shock’, 56. See also Showalter, *The Female Malady*, 192.

³⁸ Showalter, *The Female Malady*, 192.

³⁹ *Ibid*, 192-3.

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, 193.

⁴¹ Elaine Showalter, introduction to Virginia Woolf & Stella McNichol (ed.), *Mrs Dalloway* (London: Penguin, 1992; first published 1925), xlii.

ultimately, suicide becomes his only path forward; both punishment for his “crimes” and release from the mental imprisonment of his illness and the oppression of his doctors. However, ‘as Woolf makes clear ... [it] was regarded as a final admission of shameful and unmanly weakness’: after Smith leaps from a window, impaling himself on the railings below, Holmes’ final remark is to brand him a “coward.”⁴²

Beyond locating its interest in gender, class and mental health within the context of similar fascinations in 1990s British society, then, does the film’s portrayal of shell shock hold any more explicit relevance to the modern context in which it was made? It would certainly be tempting to see Septimus’ story as an allegory for ‘the fallout of post-industrialism and Thatcherism collid[ing] with the gains of feminism’ to produce a crisis of underclass male identity, especially considering the contrast established between the upper-class Dalloway and working-class Smith.⁴³ Class, however, while it is essential background detail, does not become any more central to Smith’s particular story in adaptation; the attitudes and methods of Smith’s doctors are based very much in gender – his lack of “hysterical” or physical symptoms, as well as the treatments his doctors prescribe, in fact, compare more closely with the middle-class neurasthenic officer than the working-class Tommy. It would be equally enticing to more explicitly align its interest in trauma and psychiatry with the 1990s “counselling culture,” but this is a term used to describe a mounting faith in the psychiatric institution, of which the film remains highly critical. We are left, therefore, with Woolf’s point-of-view, specific to the inter-war epoch in which she wrote, that I would argue dominates the film’s representation of gender and mental illness.

Interestingly, however, *Mrs Dalloway* does happen to be closely associated with a consideration of how shell shock and its surrounding issues might have a modern analogue. Michael Cunningham’s novel (1998) and Stephen Daldry’s 2002 film adaptation of *The Hours* considers the effect of Woolf’s story on three women in three distinct time periods: the author herself (Nicole Kidman) is writing it in 1923, Julianne Moore’s depressed housewife is reading

⁴² Showalter, *The Female Malady*, 193.

⁴³ Monk, ‘Men in the 90s’, 157.

it in 1951, and in 2001, Clarissa Vaughan (Meryl Streep) is living a modern rendering of its events. In this latter tale, the character Richard Brown, an AIDS sufferer, can be read as a contemporary version of Septimus Smith. We can draw close comparisons between their respective afflictions: both were heavily stigmatised, were epidemic in nature, and often came with harmful insinuations about a patient's gender and/or sexual identity. Both characters, as if any further parallel were needed, commit suicide by throwing themselves from a window.

The remainder of this chapter is dedicated to a film that blends a fictionalised story with historical fact to speak, perhaps, as much of its present as of the past it represents. It also happens to be one of the most all-encompassing examples of the many issues and themes associated with British cinema's representation of shell shock; of how the various and interwoven concerns relating to gender, national identity, and mental health in Britain in the years leading up to the First World War – as I have detailed in the introduction to this thesis – manifested themselves during wartime. An extended analysis, therefore, is warranted.

Regeneration takes the shell shock hospital in Craiglockhart, Edinburgh, as its setting, and its most famous patients – the war poets Siegfried Sassoon (James Wilby) and Wilfred Owen (Stuart Bunce) – and the noted army psychiatrist and advocate of analytical treatments of war neuroses, W. H. R. Rivers (Jonathan Pryce), as its central characters. Following Barker's novel, it also adds a fictional character, a working-class, asthmatic, shell-shocked officer named Billy Prior (Jonny Lee Miller), whose condition is manifesting itself in the form of mutism and memory loss. Starting in 1917, it covers the period that Sassoon spent at Craiglockhart, having been admitted for psychological treatment by the then Under-Secretary of State for War in an attempt to discredit his widely-publicised anti-war letter, and explores his relationships with Owen and Rivers; Rivers' combative clinical interactions with Prior and professional relationship with the infamous proponent of disciplinary treatments, Dr. Lewis Yealland (John

Neville), and Prior's whirlwind romance with Sarah Lumb (Tanya Allen), a young munitions worker.⁴⁴

It is by no means exhaustive, but MacKinnon's film reflects many of the particularly British concerns surrounding the shell shock phenomenon, primarily the role played by class in the perception of war neurosis as a failure or renegotiation of masculine ideals. It also helps to delineate several of the concerns that the epidemic brought into a wider global consciousness: the breakdown of masculinity as a loss of authority through degeneration into a feminine or infantile state and the conflicts between the perceptions of and approaches towards the condition.

This is due, in part, to its taking as its subject the only historical shell shock case 'in which both sides of the doctor-patient relationship were recorded.'⁴⁵ Though useful, it is a double-edged sword: it must be noted that, as Shephard claims,

Sassoon was not the typical patient, or Craiglockhart the only such [shell shock] hospital ... It was inevitable that when historians rediscovered shellshock they should be drawn ... to the work of Rivers and the other 'psychologists' ... inevitable, too, that, in ordering a subject of huge complexity, they should revive the rhetorical distinction first made by Rivers and his contemporaries – between the humane, analytically-minded methods of the 'psychologists' and the authoritarian, sometimes brutal approach of more mechanistically-minded 'physicalist' doctors.⁴⁶

Said distinction informed much of the work on the gendered dimensions of shell shock – initially by Elaine Showalter, heavily influenced by Eric Leed's *No Man's Land* – that in turn informed Barker's (and, subsequently, MacKinnon's) story and therefore my own analysis of *Regeneration*.⁴⁷ Shephard may be right to accuse these scholars of oversimplifying a complex issue, 'more concerned to recruit [the disorder] to the gender wars ... than to establish its on-

⁴⁴ The open letter, entitled *Finished with the War: A Soldier's Declaration*, was recited in the House of Commons and later reprinted in *The Times* and *The Daily Mail*. For further background and analysis see Paul Moeves, *Siegfried Sassoon: Scorched Glory – A Critical Study* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1997), 43-7.

⁴⁵ Tracey Loughran, *Shell-shock in First World War Britain: an intellectual and medical history, c.1860–c.1920*, PhD thesis, Queen Mary, University of London (2006), 242.

⁴⁶ Ben Shephard, 'The Early Treatment of Mental Disorders': R. G. Rows and Maghull, 1914–1918', in Freeman & Berrios (eds.), *150 Years of British Psychiatry, Vol. II*, 434.

⁴⁷ See Showalter, *The Female Malady*, 167-94 (see 277, fn. 19 on the influence of Leed's work); Eric Leed, *No Man's Land: Combat & Identity in World War I* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979).

the-ground historical reality,' but the focus of this thesis on cinema means it can do no more than examine what has been presented by filmmakers, however out of touch with historical reality they may be.⁴⁸ My piece on the film – and others that also depict the same kind of division – becomes an examination of a narrative (Barker and MacKinnon's) within another narrative (Leed and Showalter's) that itself interprets a set of historical truths.

Billy Prior's story is central to our consideration of the interconnected issues of shell shock, class, and gender in *Regeneration*. In creating the character, Barker seems to have attempted to distil the histories of the more than 80,000 psychiatric casualties into a single representative figure in her quest to explore these themes. In a simplified form (namely, with no reference to his bisexuality or history of childhood abuse that appear in the novel – Barker has said that the film is justified in focussing on the class aspects of the novel, because 'there is actually very little sex in the book,' and Prior's sexuality 'isn't all that complex,' unlike in the two subsequent books in the trilogy⁴⁹) this is reflected in the adaptation. For Shephard, this belies the historical truth upon which the story purports to be based – instead, it becomes rooted in 'chic abstractions ... not in solid historical originals. Its tone is, nearly always, false.'⁵⁰ Whilst it may be a valid argument, this does not in itself stop the construction of Prior's character being effective in its attempt to examine the aforementioned thematic concerns in relation to their historical counterparts. When we consider, though, that he is supposed to represent a typical working class soldier, we must also acknowledge that he may not, in eventually submitting to Rivers' talking therapy, conform to many of the stereotypes associated with the group's relationship to mental healthcare. As Shephard asserts:

In 1917, psychotherapy had barely left the womb, the whole subject of "nerves" was treated with jocular dismissal or alcoholic denial, and discussing your state of mind was not the respectable activity it has since become – least of all by anyone of working-class origin, for whom mental illness carried the horror and stigma of the madhouse. Things were still pre-Freudian.⁵¹

⁴⁸ Shephard, 'The Early Treatment of Mental Disorders', 434.

⁴⁹ Pat Barker qtd. in Mark Sinker, 'Temporary Gentlemen', *Sight & Sound*, 7:12 (1997), 23.

⁵⁰ Ben Shephard, 'Digging up the past', *The Times Literary Supplement*, 4851 (March 1996), 13.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

He is similarly critical, as we will see, of the construction of Rivers and Yealland's characters. It is important to remember that Shephard is writing from the perspective of a historian, something that Barker and MacKinnon, primarily, are not. While they should be acknowledged, historical discrepancies such as these do not invalidate, as Shephard's article might lead one to believe, the film (or indeed the book) as a document. They are interpretations, not reproductions, of the truth. The historical issue of shell shock, surely, is far too complex to encapsulate in a single text, and the imaginative reshaping and retelling of events in service of a theme or critical standpoint is what sets a dramatised historical narrative apart from simple history.

The interpretations of the storytellers, in this case, are made from the perspective of the 1990s. Shephard, the historian, for whom historical accuracy is paramount, is highly critical of *Regeneration* for 'projecting the preoccupations of the 1990s onto its wartime protagonists.'⁵² Prior 'is a vehicle for modern baggage about shrinks and psychotherapy' transferred by Barker (and later MacKinnon) to her 1917 setting, a time during which 'only Bloomsbury intellectuals were aware of psychoanalysis.'⁵³ Shephard gives the example of Prior, decidedly not one of these intellectuals, being familiar with certain psychoanalytical terms and challenging Rivers' methods, things that, as claimed in the extended quote above, would have been very unlikely. For Pierre Sorlin, of course, this was an inevitability, and exactly why the film is thematically in tune with, not detached from, its production context. It is a manifestation of the "counselling culture," of a fuller appreciation of trauma and therapy in the 1990s. Through Prior, whose circumstances have left him (as we will see) in a crisis of class and gender identity, the film reflects the similar crisis of masculinity among British working class men in the 1990s.

Prior's shell-shocked condition is represented as an intricate combination of the breakdown of typically masculine traits and transition or regression to the feminine or infantile other. The background to his character situates him in a tenuous position where his masculinity is concerned. He is an example of a "temporary gentleman," and if George Robb is correct in

⁵² Loughran, *Shell-shock in First World War Britain*, 238.

⁵³ Shephard, 'Digging up the past', 13.

his assertion that the Army ‘recreated the British class system in miniature: aristocratic generals, middle-class officers, and a working class rank and file,’ then Prior’s is a position that may throw his authority into question among the men under his command.⁵⁴ The physical impairment of his asthma could also be seen as an unmanly trait – indeed, physical health is one of the three central concepts of Victorian and Edwardian notions of ‘heroic masculinity’ that Meyer identifies.⁵⁵ His mutism is an interesting detail, being among the most common symptoms of shell shock in lower ranks but rare among officers.⁵⁶ Thus the stability of his status as an officer is further called into question. Early in the film Rivers tells Prior that ‘officers don’t suffer from mutism,’ a comment his patient takes exception to in a later scene, revealing his insecurity.

In a key sequence the film interprets the external reaction to his sudden mental collapse – that of the men under his command – as a loss of faith in his authority. In the immediately preceding scene, Prior has agreed to undergo hypnosis with Rivers in an attempt to recover his lost memories of the battlefield. In flashback, we witness his memory of the immediate circumstances of his mental collapse. His trench is hit by a shell explosion, killing one of his soldiers. Here we discover the root of his trauma: he holds open a sack into which three men shovel the dismembered remains of the slain man; as he turns away in mortified disgust, he sees a disembodied eyeball in the mud and picks it up. “What shall I do with this gobstopper?,” he asks one of the men, his last spoken words before seemingly beginning to choke, his mutism setting in. The man’s reaction is one of panic; of a realisation that they have effectively lost their leadership. A tracking shot follows, and we accompany Prior, in point-of-view, through the ranks of his men, their expressions a mixture of dismay and dread. This scene could be read in line with Showalter and others’ arguments with regard to the ‘feminising tendencies’ of (in this case mental) debility.⁵⁷ If authority and the ability to lead are masculine qualities then this sequence certainly points to Prior’s feminisation as a result of his psychological disintegration.

⁵⁴ Robb, *British Culture and the First World War*, 84.

⁵⁵ Meyer, ‘Gladder to be going out than afraid’, 196-7.

⁵⁶ Showalter, *The Female Malady*, 175.

⁵⁷ Bourke, *Dismembering the Male*, 74.

There are a number of other examples within Prior's story that cohere with this particular construction of the anti-masculine. The fact that his neurosis manifests as mutism is significant here in that, as has been mentioned, it places doubt on his officer-like qualities. He cannot reconcile his casting in the role of the 'hysterical soldier' with his conception of himself as an officer, perhaps the 'complex and overworked neurasthenic.'⁵⁸ Instead, his inability to communicate verbally reduces him to 'a feminine state of powerlessness, frustration, and dependency.'⁵⁹ As Madeleine A. Cahill and Martin F. Norden point out, it is also an ailment that cinema has habitually defined as feminine.⁶⁰ Towards the end of the film Prior learns he is to be deployed back into service on the home front, a role stereotypically associated with the feminine both in the metaphorical sense of domesticity and the "home," and historically in that the war saw swathes of women step into roles vacated by service-bound men. He sees this fate as shameful; a final confirmation of his failure as a leader of men. He was "a perfectly good officer," as he puts it, until he "stopped being a perfectly good officer." The interplay between Prior and Sarah is a good illustration of this. She is an example of one of these aforementioned women; a young worker in the traditionally masculine realm of a munitions factory. Established gender roles are reversed as she is frequently framed as taller or larger in the shot, a more dominating, controlling influence over the smaller, meeker Prior. She retains some of her femininity in her costuming, but here too we can see a masculine influence creeping in – her trench coat is not a far cry from the military version worn by Prior.

Both elements of Prior's emasculation – the breakdown of his authority and his mutism – could alternatively be interpreted in line with Meyer's description of infantilisation, a lack of control over adults and an inability to communicate as much hallmarks of immaturity as of antiquated codes of femininity. As I noted in the description of the "eyeball scene" earlier, Prior's traumatised reaction to the encounter with the severed organ is to see it as a gobstopper, an object strongly evocative of childhood. His relationship with Sarah, again, is perhaps the

⁵⁸ Showalter, *The Female Malady*, 175.

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, 175.

⁶⁰ David Martin-Jones, 'Sexual healing: representations of the English in post-devolutionary Scotland', *Screen*, 46:2 (2005), 230; Madeleine A. Cahill & Martin F. Norden, 'Hollywood's Portrayals of Disabled Women', in Hans, A. & Patri, A. (eds.), *Women, Disability and Identity* (London: Sage, 2003), 57-8.

most robust example of this regression to immaturity. In this case it could be argued that she is not herself masculinised, but rather the controlling influence of her femininity is intensified, thereby emasculating Prior. The camera's construction of Sarah as a physically larger, dominating presence could here be read as simply adult rather than masculine, Prior the child in the scenario. David Martin-Jones briefly notes the relationship's maternal qualities, reading it as a regenerative influence, but in the context of Meyer's reading of the link between shell shock and masculinity, the configuration of Sarah as a motherly figure could be perceived as a sign of Prior's lack of recovery.⁶¹ The maternal character of their connection begins to reveal itself from their initial meeting, in which Sarah wonders if there is any such thing as love between a man and a woman. "For your children, yes," she says, "but for a man, no." When she rejects his initial sexual advances in the following scene she is rejecting a man she feels she cannot love. When, soon after, with his head resting on her shoulder, she peels off his leather gloves – sensing the vulnerability beneath the tough exterior – and places his hand gently on her breast, is she comforting a child? Certainly, taking into account her earlier words and the powerful evocation of motherhood through the symbol of the breast, it appears that her "love" for him is closer to that of a mother for a helpless child than the romantic love of a woman for a man.

Yet the film simultaneously suggests that their sexual union is his route to remasculinisation and apparent recovery. In a conversation with Rivers, Prior describes the exhilaration he felt on the battlefield. Going over the top was "like sex. Exciting, and ridiculous ... I wasn't frightened at all, I just felt this amazing burst of exaltation." This revelation is accompanied by a flashback sequence in which he boldly leads a group of his men over no-man's land, shouting constant commands, apparently unfazed by the relentless sound of whirring bullets and bodies crumpling all around him. He is a model of masculine courage and control in this moment, but it quickly starts to fall apart – suddenly he is "in the air" and, as Rivers recounts, the subsequent four days are unaccounted for in his memory before he wakes up at an aid station. In this equation of sex and combat, the film interprets the breakdown of

⁶¹ Martin-Jones, 'Sexual healing', 230.

his ability to fight as a failure of his virility and sexuality. It is through the sexual act, as noted by Martin-Jones, that he is 're-masculinised':

When he first has sex with Sarah, Prior's initial association of the war with intercourse is once again brought to the fore. This act, however, purges him of his traumatic memory. Before we become aware of Prior and Sarah, we see an aerial tracking shot of overgrown sand dunes. Accompanied by the sounds of machine gun fire and the cries of wounded men, this empty landscape immediately recalls the battlefields of France that feature in the film's opening shot ... Cutting from the scene of Prior having sex with Sarah, we are presented with an image of him standing alone, surveying no-man's land just as he previously remembered it. This time however, when he turns and looks back his dead comrades are no longer there. Instead no-man's land is now empty. Thus, by replacing the traumatic memory of the war with the regenerative act of intercourse, the ghosts of Prior's past are exorcized.⁶²

But, as the strong maternal attributes of the relationship would indicate, Billy Prior remains, at least partially, in a childlike state. The last time we see him he is once again in the motherly embrace of Sarah, small and submissive in the frame as she dominates the space, his head against her chest and his hand in hers, a shot that would seem to lend credence to the notion that although his symptoms have diminished enough to earn his discharge from Craiglockhart, his mind remains ravaged by his experiences. This reflects a central theme of the memory of the First World War at large: that its consequences – especially the personal and national suffering it caused – would resonate both temporally and geographically far beyond its immediate circumstances.

Moving away from the fictionalised, individualised story of Prior, *Regeneration* can also be explored in the broader context of the national response to shell shock. Recall the argument made by Shephard, detailed in the introduction, that this response can be read in terms of a dichotomy between the "masculine" and "feminine" attributes of pre-war Britain. It is possible to argue that, through both their depiction in *Regeneration* and certain historical accounts, the apparent dichotomy between W. H. R. Rivers and another noted wartime psychiatrist, Lewis Yealland, demonstrates this point in microcosm. Both pioneers, in very different ways, in the

⁶² *Ibid*, 229-30.

field of psychiatric healthcare, several historians of shell shock have argued that their treatment methods for the disorder are found at opposite ends of a punitive/compassionate – and, if Shephard is to be believed, a masculine/feminine – spectrum. Showalter has been the foremost proponent of dichotomising them in this fashion.⁶³ She has suggested that ‘Yealland was probably the most extreme advocate of disciplinary treatment among the English doctors,’ the callousness of his use of electric shocks equal to the callousness of his bedside manner: “It makes very little difference to me what you think of your condition,” Yealland told [a patient] ... After ten minutes of strong electric shocks he had stopped what Yealland called his “silly noises.””⁶⁴ In stark contrast, she describes her perception of Rivers and Craiglockhart: “This time the patient and the doctor were friends; the therapy was kindly and gentle; the hospital was luxurious, the most advanced Freudian ideas came into play. Yet the reprogramming of the patient’s consciousness was more profound and longer-lasting than in Yealland’s electrical laboratory.’ Rivers, she adds, ‘was associated with the most enlightened, probing, humane, and sensitive studies of wartime neurosis.’⁶⁵ Showalter was working within a framework established by Leed, which juxtaposed the “moral,” punitive approach to treating war neuroses with the “analytic” view which, he argued, was best represented by the same psychoanalytical therapy that Rivers espoused.⁶⁶

How can we extend this portrait of Edwardian society and the British military’s response to psychological breakdown to *Regeneration*’s depiction of Yealland and Rivers? Their meeting in the film is brief but rich with subtext, but before that we can read Rivers as a man divided within himself along similar lines. In the scene immediately preceding his departure to meet with Yealland, we learn that he is inheriting symptoms of shell shock – a stammer, a nervous twitch – from his patients. He emphasises a feeling of powerlessness, a “feminine” characteristic that recalls that which haunted Billy Prior. He feels “in charge but not in control.”

⁶³ Showalter, *The Female Malady*, 167-94.

⁶⁴ Lewis Yealland qtd. in *ibid*, 178.

⁶⁵ *Ibid*, 178, 184.

⁶⁶ Leed, *No Man’s Land*, 166-70.



Fig. 10. Dr. Yealland's "laboratory."

His symptoms may be a physical expression of a deeper conflict 'between his duties as a doctor and as a representative of the military.'⁶⁷

In the same scene, Rivers claims that Yealland's methods cure 100% of his patients. "So does death," his colleague, examining him, responds. Yealland's reputation as an almost monstrous figure precedes him. The film does little to refute this. His hospital – never explicitly named so, but presumably the hospital at Queen Square in London where he worked from 1915 – imposing and castle-esque with its circular turrets; the treatment room, medical instruments and an electronic switchboard surrounding a chair fitted with restraints (paralleling Showalter's likening of his clinic to a laboratory where the disabled are 'reprogrammed'); and Yealland himself, an older, British man with upper-class accent, glasses, white coat and rubber gloves, all contribute to an image that falls somewhere between an archetype of British masculinity and a kind of villainous mad doctor (Figure 10).⁶⁸ The film does not quite go so far as to stereotype him in this latter way: he believes his techniques are humane because they do not prolong the patient's pain as much as Rivers' psychological methods. What it does suggest is that he represents the unsympathetic, utilitarian, masculine side of war psychiatry, which,

⁶⁷ Loughran, *Shell-shock in First World War Britain*, 237.

⁶⁸ Showalter, *The Female Malady*, 178.

broadly speaking, emphasised the disciplinary treatment (“the last thing a patient needs is a sympathetic audience”) of neuroses as a bodily disorder rather than a psychological one. Hence the medical equipment, and a treatment based on the application of electrical currents to affected areas of the body, such as the larynx of a patient suffering from mutism – and the importance placed on the swiftest possible return of patients to the front. He places a clear expectation of military manliness upon his patients, telling one, “I expect you to behave like the hero you are ... a man who’s been through many battles, and has good control of himself.” He also insists the soldier salute him once he is cured.

Rivers is set in opposition to Yealland; a progressive, humane, feminine presence. Discussing his London meeting with Sassoon, the doctor admits the “great effect” of his colleague’s “almost miraculous” methods, but laments that to talk was the mute patient’s only way to protest the painful treatments inflicted upon him. He was not a man but a “fighting unit being repaired,” his return to the front the only important thing. Sassoon contends that Rivers would not use pain, performing “gentler miracles.” His lack of medical paraphernalia – he does not wear a white coat and his office contains no medical instruments – reflects the stress he places on psychoanalytical therapy. He performs these therapies in the green and picturesque countryside surroundings of the elegant Craiglockhart, which play in contrast to the Queen Square building.

It is worth noting that, as various more contemporary scholars have argued, Leed, Showalter and *Regeneration*’s portrayal of this psychiatric landscape as a neat dichotomy is problematic. The ‘convenient dramatic contrast’ between Rivers and Yealland’s treatment practices and the clinical ideology behind them is not borne out in historical or medical data.⁶⁹ A 2013 study by Stefanie Linden, Edgar Jones and Andrew Lees confronted a number of common misconceptions relating to Yealland and his therapies, including his claims of a 100% success rate and reliance on strong electric currents to treat his patients, neither of which were supported by their findings. The former, they argue, came about as a result of Yealland’s own

⁶⁹ Dennis Duffy qtd. in Stefanie C. Linden, Edgar Jones & Andrew J. Lees, ‘Shell shock at Queen Square: Lewis Yealland 100 years on’, *Brain*, 136 (2013), 1986.

over-representation of successful cases in his 1918 book, *Hysterical Disorders of Warfare*. They also posit that while

Yealland's treatment undoubtedly had a punitive component ... this was only part of a more comprehensive treatment concept. Contrary to its literary [and subsequent filmic] depiction, faradism [a type of electric shock therapy] for Yealland was not primarily a punishment but part of a form of suggestive treatment. Furthermore, according to the case records ... Yealland mainly used weak currents and only resorted to painful strong currents if the patient did not respond to first-line treatment.⁷⁰

Shephard concurs, claiming that Yealland is portrayed as 'a classic medical villain,' but in truth, 'he was a medical primitive ... [whose] methods may seem brutal and degrading today; they made some colleagues uneasy at the time, but they seemed to work. Chronic hysterical cases which had resisted months of treatment were cured.'⁷¹ Shephard blames Barker for this popular view of Yealland taking hold: 'after lifting pages wholesale from Yealland's graphic account, [she] omits the climax where the cured patient says, "Doctor, Doctor, I am champion. Why did they not send me to you nine months ago?"⁷² Furthermore, the depiction of Yealland as an older British gentleman lends a sense of masculine authority to his character, but in fact he was Canadian and in his early thirties – twenty years Rivers' junior – when he moved to Britain during the war. After his death in 1954, his obituary called his personality 'delightful' and notes the 'atmosphere of calm philosophy' he cultivated in his post-war civilian medical practice – a far cry from the malevolent presence we experience in watching the film.⁷³ Showalter's characterisation of Craiglockhart as 'luxurious' is paralleled in the film but, as Allan Young points out, 'Sassoon described it as a "dilapidated hydro."⁷⁴ Young does concede, though, that

⁷⁰ *Ibid*, 1986. For more on these misconceptions see Stefanie C. Linden & Edgar Jones, "Shell shock' Revisited: An Examination of the Case Records of the National Hospital in London', *Medical History*, 58:4 (2014), 523-4; Fiona Reid, "His nerves gave way': Shell shock, history and the memory of the First World War in Britain', *Endeavour*, 38:2 (2014), 96-7; Young, *The Harmony of Illusions*, 67-72.

⁷¹ Shephard, 'Digging up the past', 13.

⁷² *Ibid*.

⁷³ Anon., 'Obituary: Lewis Ralph Yealland', *The Lancet*, 263:6811 (1954), 577-8.

⁷⁴ Young, *The Harmony of Illusions*, 70-1.

‘its sunny rooms and therapeutic conversations were a world apart from the electrical room’ at Queen Square.⁷⁵

The crisis of masculinity presented by shell shock is interrogated in detail in MacKinnon’s *Regeneration*. In the broadness of its scope, it manages to touch upon many of the themes tackled by the films studied in this thesis: shell shock as a cause of emasculation often characterised by loss of authority or degeneration to a feminine or infantile state; the varying effectiveness of analytical and physical therapies as a route to re-masculinisation; the fusion of class and gender in the cause of this masculine breakdown among British soldiers. It is also, in its combination of period detail and contemporary concerns, demonstrative of how historical films can speak to both the past they represent and the present in which they were made. At the turn of the century, with the centenary of the First World War coming into view, this cinematic dynamic was to change. With the memory of the conflict increasingly writ large in the public and political consciousness, the central concern of the Great War narrative became, arguably, the Great War itself – an idea the final chapter will explore.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

One Hundred Years On: Cinema and Shell Shock in the Twenty-First Century

In the introduction to his book *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning*, Jay Winter claims that ‘the end of the twentieth century appears disturbingly close to its beginnings,’ and that ‘the ideological and geo-political divide which grew out of the 1914-1918 conflict’ was playing out once again at the end of Cold War.¹ The period surrounding the turn of the century was thus an especially crucial time in which to recall and reflect upon the First World War, an imperative that has stretched through the twenty-first century and to the present day. There are a number of other reasons, aside from Winter’s, that this period has been marked by an increased sense of public, political, and cultural awareness of the war – a ‘memory boom,’ as he calls it.² The remembrance, specifically, of the traumatised soldier was stimulated by the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, through which the fascination with and growing knowledge of trauma in the eighties and nineties persisted. As Rebecca J. Anderson notes, traumatised veterans of both wars ‘have more in common than anyone cares to admit.’³ Shell shock has also been brought to the fore in the twenty-first century, more importantly, simply by being emblematic of a war more and more prominent in the public imagination as each decennial memorial passed – eighty years in 1998, ninety in 2008 – coming to a head with the beginning of four years of commemorations marked by the centenary of the outbreak in 2014. Along with various anniversary tributes and activities, in 2006 the British government granted posthumous pardons to all army personnel executed for military offences during the war and, as the conflict passed from living memory with the death of its last surviving veteran, Florence Green, in 2012, its preservation in the public memory only seemed that much more crucial.⁴

¹ Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning*, 1.

² Jay Winter, *Remembering War: The Great War Between Memory and History in the Twentieth Century* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006), 276.

³ Anderson, ‘An Old Injury’, 204. It is important to note that, in a strict historical and medical sense, shell shock and PTSD are not on a linear continuum. See Bonikowski, *Shell Shock and the Modernist Imagination*, 1 (fn. 1).

⁴ Simon Wessely has detailed the case of one such soldier, Private Harry Farr, who was executed for cowardice in October 1916 despite a prior shell shock diagnosis. See Simon Wessely, ‘The life and death of Private Harry Farr’,

Cultural reflections of the war have played a major role in this surge in public awareness. Wilfred Owen, for example, has been the subject of several commemorative events.⁵ The visual arts, following the pattern established in this thesis this far, has also responded emphatically to this post-2000 culture of remembrance. New theatrical releases, which we will come to later, were accompanied by restorations, screenings and re-releases of seminal films – *The Battle of the Somme* in 2008 and *Paths of Glory* in 2014, for example – a number of popular television series dealing centrally with the war and – in the cases of ITV's *Downton Abbey* (2010-15) and the BBC's *Birdsong*, *Parade's End* (both 2012) and *Peaky Blinders* (2013-present) – its personal and/or national traumas; and a veritable deluge of television documentaries. Owen was once again the subject of memorial in *Wilfred Owen: A Remembrance Tale* (BBC, 2007) and the experiences of his contemporaries were revealed in *War of Words: Soldier-Poets of the Somme* (BBC, 2014). Vera Brittain, the film adaptation of whose *Testament of Youth* is analysed in this chapter, was also the subject of a BBC documentary, *A Woman in Love and War*, in 2008, while *The Somme* (Channel 4, 2005) and *The Somme: From Defeat to Victory* (BBC, 2006) remembered their titular battle and *Not Forgotten* (Channel 4, 2005-09) explored the various reverberations of the conflict in post-war British society. In 2013, the BBC announced a season of some 2,500 hours of World War I-related content – including documentaries as well as arts, music, drama, debate and children's programming, spanning the four years of the centenary and spearheaded by the four-part factual series *Britain's Great War* (2014).⁶

In fitting with Winter's argument, in certain ways, cinema also brings us full circle in the century since 1914. The groups of films that bookend the period between the outbreak and

Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine, 99 (2006). The late 2000s and early 2010s also saw the passing of several other significant individuals: Franz Künstler, the last surviving soldier to fight on the side of the Central Powers, in 2008; Harry Patch, the last veteran of the trenches, in 2009 and Frank Buckles, the last American veteran of the war and Claude Choules, the last combat veteran, both in 2011.

⁵ See three *BBC News* articles: Anon., 'School unveils war poet Wilfred Owen plaque' (21 August 2014) <bbc.com/news/uk-scotland-edinburgh-east-fife-28882368>; 'War poet Wilfred Owen honoured at Craiglockhart hospital site' (30 November 2015) <bbc.com/news/uk-scotland-edinburgh-east-fife-34963298>; 'Daniel Day-Lewis reads Wilfred Owen works in War Poets Collection' (1 November 2016) <bbc.com/news/uk-scotland-edinburgh-east-fife-37834436>.

⁶ See Alex Fletcher, 'BBC reveals ambitious four-year First World War Centenary season', *Digital Spy* (16 October 2013) <digitalspy.com/tv/news/a523925/bbc-reveals-ambitious-four-year-first-world-war-centenary-season/>.

the centenary – amounting to the greater part of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first – are unlike those that were produced in these intervening decades, which, as we have seen, almost always depicted the war with a blinkered preoccupation with their own immediate cultural context. Its acute immediacy meant that the propaganda films discussed in the first chapter could represent the war for its own sake. By the same token, those explored in this chapter chiefly look to the First World War not to allegorise some more modern issue or idea, but to reflect on a conflict returned to the public consciousness – again, on its own terms and for the sake of its memory – as it had fifty years earlier. The key difference between those made between 1914 and 1918 and these modern works and is that, where the nature and content of the former was dictated by the political and ideological imperatives of the war effort, the latter could draw upon the example set by post-war cinema and the greater understanding – and critical view – of it, developed in the intervening period, to represent the war with a familiar honesty, pacifistic tone, or emphasis on its brutality and futility. Many have responded to the renewed interest in the war whilst offering little that has not already been seen on the big screen: Spielberg's *War Horse* (2011) and the 2012 adaptation of Michael Morpurgo's young adult novel, *Private Peaceful*, for example. Others have seen an opportunity to look at the conflict from a new perspective. This chapter will look briefly at two films in which trauma plays a more nebulous role in these fresh modes of storytelling about the Great War – coontrasting *The Trench* (William Boyd, 1999), which centralises the working-class experience of the western front, and *Deathwatch* (Michael J. Bassett, 2002), which portrays the hellishness of the trenches according to the conventions of the horror film – before exploring at length a film in which shell shock is more explicitly rendered: the first feature-length adaptation of Vera Brittain's memoir *Testament of Youth* (James Kent, 2014), which looks at the psychological impact of the war from a female point-of-view.⁷

The absence of the American experience in the cinematic output of this period is conspicuous. The only examples have come either from television – in the form of the television

⁷ The book has previously been adapted for BBC television in 1979. A fifteen-part BBC Radio Four dramatisation of Brittain's wartime correspondence, on which much of *Testament of Youth* is based, was broadcast in 1998 under the title *Letters from a Lost Generation*.

movie *The Lost Battalion* (Russell Mulcahy, 2001) and HBO's Prohibition-era gangster drama *Boardwalk Empire* (2010-2014), the latter being one instance in which the presence of shell shock is explicitly felt⁸ – or in romanticised action-adventure pieces like *Flyboys* (Tony Bill, 2006). In these, needless to say, the traumatic neurosis of the war is elided. The continued popularity of other wars in Hollywood cinema may point to the opportunity for heroic action and glamourisation of combat – in, say, Michael Bay's World War II drama *Pearl Harbour* (2001) – often a commercial imperative and a quality lacking in World War I narratives, as one possible reason for this. There have also been, however, many instances in which recent American films have followed their predecessors in taking a more realist, critical approach to the depiction of various military conflicts – Sam Mendes' *Jarhead* (2005), set in the Gulf War, is just one example – so we might return to the idea that the Great War's relatively limited place in American history continues to precipitate similarly limited cinematic interest, even at the centenary. Whatever the reason, it renders the landscape of filmic shell shock in this era (and, therefore, this chapter) inevitably Anglo-centric.

The Trench looks to break from the trend in British films, from *Journey's End* and *The Return of the Soldier* to *King & Country* and *Regeneration*, to centralise the higher ranks and social elite in exploring the class politics of the trenches. Despite the significant presence of working-class characters, especially in the latter two, Alan Burton notes that these films 'filter the sensitive and controversial issues of duty, service, responsibility, justice and humanity through the officer class and display little actual engagement with the other ranks.'⁹ His analysis of Boyd's film, which observes a British trench in the two days leading up to the Battle of the Somme, concentrates on its indictment of the officer class – far from an original angle in itself – through its focus on the experience of a group of young, working-class, ordinary Tommies.¹⁰ It does this, Burton notes,

⁸ See Brion White, 'Boardwalk Empire, shell shock and the Great War: the characters of militarism', *Continuum* (published online: 22 September 2016).

⁹ Burton, 'Death or glory?', 40.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, 40-2.

in terms of a conventional notion of realism. On only a single, but significant, occasion does the film foreground the process of representation. This occurs in an important scene in which the platoon is filmed by the 'flickers' in a staged set-up for a patriotic documentary. It is made clear here that the front-line soldiers' enthusiasm and patriotism are manufactured for the camera ... as the film crew and senior officer depart, a disrespectful comment is aimed after them – but of course, such dissent will remain outside the 'official' representation of the war.¹¹

Shell shock, of course, was another reality of trench life that was largely elided in these official representations – as we saw in my earlier discussion of propaganda films. However, *The Trench*'s focus on the class warfare waged between officers and men overshadows its rendering of the internal psychological battles fought by the men against their dire circumstances, surely a part of the experience impossible to overlook in a film of this nature. This is not, however, a production that lives up to the admittedly lofty standards set by the grim portraits of trench conditions from *All Quiet on the Western Front* to – as I will explain – *Deathwatch*. The reviewer for *Sight & Sound* called *The Trench*'s 'austere stylisation ... both clichéd and absurdly inadequate. The studio mock-up of the British trench system fails to deliver the oppressive dirt and squalor of the genuine article and the actors ... always look like actors dressed up as soldiers rather than men who are actively subsisting in their long hole in the ground.'¹² Not a cinematic environment, then, pervaded by the traumatic atmosphere that we know from history was ever-present. It is part of the film's point, it must be said, to stress the naivety of these mostly teenage soldiers: perhaps the weak and distant boom of shells, along with this lacklustre visual sense, reflects this: they have not yet been exposed to the war's fullest horrors and are unaware that they are preparing for a forthcoming battle that would prove to be one of history's bloodiest and most brutal. Nevertheless, trauma does seem underrepresented, muted, distant and, where it does appear, inadequate: a feeling perhaps summed up by the figure of Lieutenant Harte (Julian Rhind-Tutt), the film's only overt representation of the war neurotic, who is little more than, as Burton observes, a 'clichéd shadow of *Journey's End*'s Stanhope ... [who] has taken to drink, for, as he says, it "keeps me sane".¹³

¹¹ *Ibid*, 41.

¹² Tom Tunney, 'The Trench/La Tranchée', *Sight & Sound*, 9:10 (1999), 57.

¹³ Burton, 'Death or glory?', 40.

Where *The Trench* offers a new perspective on familiar themes (the incompetence of the military leadership), *Deathwatch* is a fresh take on the formal cinematic language of the First World War. Operating within the conventions of the supernatural and psychological horror genre allows it to explore the trenches' visual and aural nightmare in an original way. After going over the top, a band of nine British soldiers mysteriously find themselves wandering through a misty wood. They happen upon an enemy trench, finding it almost deserted save three apparently terrified German soldiers, one of whom they take prisoner. They settle in to defend the captured trench and wait for reinforcements, but a sinister presence begins to make itself known, and one by one, the soldiers begin to meet their grisly ends.

The film's visual and aural sense of the harrowing trench conditions is as good, perhaps, as any film that has preceded it. In stark contrast to *The Trench*'s sterile and inadequate portrayal, here the mud and blood flow freely, rats scuttle through almost every frame, and the rain is pounding and constant. Horror conventions add another dimension to this. The film is more at home with the abject and overtly gory, as when, for instance, one of the group steps in the soupy remnants of a corpse. It also rejects the notion of realism demonstrated in Boyd's film, allowing it to revel in aspects of the trench experience that it transforms into the uncanny: blood, which we see seeping through the walls, and corpses of German soldiers rising from the dead. The invisible, malevolent entity by which the men are haunted is the war itself; it possesses them with fear, inflicting upon them symbolic deaths via typical trench motifs: mud, rats, and barbed wire. The trench itself, maze-like and suffocating, becomes a metaphor for their psychological disturbance and entrapment.

Perhaps this is a rather literal illustration of the kind of interpretation Wyatt Bonikowski has presented of the shell-shocked man, seemingly 'inhabited by some *alien force* encountered at war and brought home with him.'¹⁴ For Linnie Blake, this force is one whose subtext is based largely in class and gender. She reads the film as a depiction of a 'microcosm of the class hegemonies of early twentieth-century British society, [which] effectively implodes under the enormous pressures of warfare exacerbated by the ostensible presence of a

¹⁴ Bonikowski, *Shell Shock and the Modernist Imagination*, 2. Emphasis mine.

malevolent supernatural force.’¹⁵ These implosions are various: the upper-class Captain Jennings (Laurence Fox), hallucinating the sound of artillery and an incoming attack, tries to cling to his authority by demanding an inspection of the few remaining men; ‘chirpy cockney sadist’ Quinn (Andy Serkis) is overcome by a sadistic, murderous frenzy, bedecking himself in furs and adopting a barbaric spiked club as his weapon of choice: they are living demonstrations of the war’s failure ‘to elevate men into heroes,’ transforming them instead into ‘crying children and bloodthirsty beasts.’¹⁶ Only the young Private Shakespeare (Jamie Bell), cowardly at first, proves himself a “real man” in standing up to Quinn and treating their prisoner humanely. Fittingly, he survives the ordeal, walking into the mist of no-man’s-land and to an unknown fate: much like the war’s survivors who, often traumatised by combat, returned home to a transformed world made unfamiliar by the experience of war. Shakespeare ‘[becomes] a man despite the class hegemonies that position him as child,’ as Blake puts it, ‘but he is certainly destined to be damaged by the experience, for only a traumatised form of masculinity can emerge from this.’¹⁷

Shell shock has been configured as an almost exclusively male disturbance since its conception. Despite having its origins, as we have seen, in what was then a “female” affliction, its status as a symbol of the suffering of the men in the trenches has not been adequately questioned in the substantial historical literature on the subject. Cinematic representations of the war have long conformed to this trend, their very nature often making their androcentrism inevitable. Some have tried to redress the balance of male/female representation with narratives set in arenas in which women’s presence can be felt: in the returning veteran film, for example, like *The Sun Also Rises* or *The Return of the Soldier*, where they are wives or mothers, or they might appear as objects of soldiers’ desire during breaks from the fighting, as in *Woman to Woman* and *All Quiet on the Western Front*. Frequently they are nurses. As Denise J. Poynter points out,

¹⁵ Linnie Blake, *The Wounds of Nations: Horror Cinema, Historical Trauma and National Identity* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008), 174.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, 174, 175.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, 175.

historically, ‘the nurse has been idolised for her role in the Great War,’ as she is in a string of filmic depictions of the British nurse and martyr Edith Cavell made in the 1910s, twenties, and thirties.¹⁸ In all of the above films, however, the psychological suffering of women brought about by the war is missing; with the exception of the Cavell biopics, women are overwhelmingly assigned subordinate roles to the mentally afflicted men. Poynter has responded to this gap in a historical scholarship that has ‘focused purely on the experience of the male combatant, predominantly because of this long held preoccupation with “front-line” warfare and its consequences apparently being the preserve of men,’ offering a detailed insight into ‘the psychological problems encountered and suffered by the women who served alongside the British Expeditionary Forces ... namely nurses, voluntary aid detachments [V. A. D.], and ambulance drivers.’¹⁹ Cinematically, said gap has partially been addressed by the biographical story of one such volunteer: the author, feminist, pacifist and V. A. D. nurse Vera Brittain, in *Testament of Youth*.

The first in a trilogy of memoirs and originally published in 1933, *Testament of Youth* covers Brittain’s life from 1900 to 1925.²⁰ The film limits its scope to her experiences in the period leading up to and during the war, opening on Armistice Day, 1918 as Brittain (Alicia Vikander) makes her way through a crowd of revellers, apparently numb to their jubilation at the end of the hostilities. The film then flashes back to 1914, where, as a young woman living with her affluent family in Derbyshire, she dreams of studying at Oxford and becoming a writer. She is close to her brother, Edward (Taron Egerton) and his school friend Victor Richardson (Colin Morgan); she develops a romance with another, the aspiring poet Roland Leighton (Kit Harington), to whom she becomes engaged. The three boys quickly volunteer for service when war breaks out, and, with the gravity and horror of the distant conflict growing increasingly

¹⁸ Denise J. Poynter, ‘*The Report on her Transfer was Shell Shock’: A Study of the Psychological Disorders of Nurses and Female Voluntary Aid Detachments who served alongside the British Expeditionary and Allied Forces during the First World War, 1914-1918*, PhD thesis, University of Northampton (2008), i. Rival Australian productions of 1916, entitled *Nurse Cavell* (directed by W. J. Lincoln) and *The Martyrdom of Nurse Cavell* (John Gavin & C. Post Mason), along with the American-made *The Woman the Germans Shot* (John G. Adolphi, 1918), are all now considered lost. There is also the British director Herbert Wilcox’s *Dawn* (1928) and his 1939 American sound remake, *Nurse Edith Cavell*.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Testament of Friendship*, published in 1940, and *Testament of Experience* (1957) complete the trilogy.

obvious, Brittain abandons her Oxford studies to become a V. A. D. nurse, serving, at one point, near the front in France. The film is essentially defined by three decisive moments: the deaths of each of these men, and the individual and cumulative effects they have on our protagonist. By the end of the film, as we return to the shattered Brittain on Armistice Day, we understand both her detachment from the celebrations and her nascent discovery of a place in a world, fundamentally transformed by the devastation of the previous four years, as a beacon for the pacifist cause. This is a film with an eye for authentic period detail, made in a sumptuous and classical visual style, reflecting a desire to look back on the history it represents broadly for its own sake.

Recall the introduction to this thesis, and my assertion that the incidence of shell shock in film is correlated with periods of marked awareness in three conceptual areas (gender, mental health, and military conflict) to which the disorder is most strongly associated. The intensification of the memory of World War I, I have argued, constitutes a marked awareness of the latter of these areas, along with the concomitant issues of gender and trauma specifically in terms of that war. Are there any other ways, though, in which this production of *Testament of Youth* can be contextualised within the social and political climate of the twenty-first century? The film's focus on the female certainly provokes these questions. Although there appears to be no explicit references to the contemporary women's experience in the theoretical areas recapped above, it is difficult to ignore the parallels between a film that so fully embraces each of the three and a modern world in which the female experience of them are highly, and increasingly, pertinent. Firstly, the issues are highly relevant today in an individual sense: gender (in)equality continues to dominate social and political discourse, global violence and conflict is ubiquitous, and understandings of the gendered dimensions of mental health are becoming increasingly central to treatment and policy.²¹ Perhaps more significantly for our purposes, the expansion of women's roles in the armed forces, bringing them closer and closer

²¹ The World Health Organisation, for example, has formally recognised the importance of gender in psychological healthcare, and instituted its Gender Policy, which looked to 'integrate gender considerations in all facets of its work,' in 2002. World Health Organisation, *Integrating Gender Perspectives in the work of WHO: WHO Gender Policy* (Geneva, 2002), 1 <apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/10665/67649/1/a78322.pdf>.

to frontline combat (a progression reflected, as we will see, in Vera Brittain's story), has brought the incidence of combat-related PTSD and other psychological disorders in women into sharper focus. The debates about this expansion have also naturally drawn attention to the differences between the genders, especially physical ones, thus the three concerns are tied together in a modern context as well as a historical one.²² However, lacking textual allusions to this contemporary milieu, remembrance seems to be the film's dominant mode of recalling the Great War.

A number of critics, including Poynter and Andrea Peterson, have posited that Brittain suffered shell shock as a consequence of her war experiences.²³ There a number of facets to the film's interpretation of this. In terms of gender, firstly, it configures Brittain's trauma in much the same way as men's has been, with subtle differences. It is, in fact, a shade more complex than many filmic understandings of male shell shock. Pre-war, as a strong-willed aspiring writer and student, she is cast as a woman whose character and ambitions are at odds with the accepted codes of her gender. Her parents press her to conform to feminine norms of marriage and parenthood, and her father is determined that to attend university would be a waste of her time. She persists, however, convinces her father and wins her place at Somerville College, Oxford. Despite entering what was then a women's college, it becomes clear that higher education is a male world in which women must masculinise to survive. Miranda Richardson's college tutor, Miss Lorimer, of severe manner, dark, stiff academic dress, and short-cropped hair, apparently unmarried, demonstrates this point all too well – she shows her feminine side

²² On this expansion and rates of incidence see Roberto J. Rona, Nicola T. Fear, Lisa Hull & Simon Wessely, 'Women in novel occupational roles: mental health trends in the UK Armed Forces', *International Journal of Epidemiology*, 36 (2007); Amy E. Street, Dawne Vogt & Lissa Dutra, 'A new generation of women veterans: Stressors faced by women deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan', *Clinical Psychology Review*, 29 (2009). In 2014 the British government ordered a review of a ban on female troops serving in close-combat roles that culminated in its abolishment in 2016, thus opening up all combat roles to women. Arguments for the continuation of the ban generally centred on doubts over the ability of women to meet the fitness standards required for these roles. See Anon., 'Women to serve in close combat roles in the British military', *BBC News* (8 July 2016) <www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-36746917>.

²³ See Poynter, *The Report on her Transfer was Shell Shock*, 8-9; Andrea Peterson, 'Shell-shocked in Somerville: Vera Brittain's post-traumatic stress disorder', in Smith, A. K. (ed.), *Gender and Warfare in the Twentieth Century* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004); Richard Badenhause, 'Mourning through Memoir: Trauma, Testimony, and Community in Vera Brittain's "Testament of Youth"', *Twentieth Century Literature*, 49:4 (2003).

only in private. When she receives news from the front of the death of her brother, she betrays only a faint (though very real) flicker of emotion.

War too, of course, is conventionally the domain of the male; there is, therefore, an even stronger sense of a need for women to assume “masculine” qualities to cope with its stresses. Brittain’s nursing career is populated by more thick-skinned, “manly” women: the matron at her first hospital assignment addresses a line of new nurses, quashing any preconceptions they might have of themselves as angelic healers: they will do whatever duty is asked of them, no matter how dirty or dull. This, allied with their uniformity of dress and the matron’s drill sergeant-esque manner, paints nursing as a female equivalent of the army. Vera’s superior in France, who coldly numbers the “huns” in her charge rather than calling them by name, talks casually, almost jovially, of having to perform an amputation herself due to lack of surgeons: “quite a job... it’s not ideal but then, this is war.” She exhorts Vera to “control your mind,” seeming herself almost completely desensitised to the misery and suffering all around her. In both of these traditionally male arenas, of education and war, Vera is expected to fall in line with an essentially masculine code. War is an extreme extension of her previous place as a woman in the man’s world of University education. Even a woman of her tenacity and resolution, however, cannot meet the demands of hardy, dispassionate detachment that coping with her particularly horrific experience of war (which I cover in detail below) would necessitate. In Vera’s case, this is further complicated by a second set of conventions to which she is expected to adhere: those of her own gender that are amplified considerably in her role as a nurse. ‘If many men were unable to cope with “the heightened code of masculinity” within the armed forces,’ Peterson contends, ‘it would seem likely that many women may have struggled to cope with the correspondingly heightened code of femininity applied to them as “ministering angels” within the nursing profession ... to push either gender role to the extreme would appear to invite psychological problems’.²⁴ Her trauma is governed and compounded, then, by an intricate and paradoxical mix of gendered norms: those of the male, aspects of which she is forced to assume, and those of her own gender.

²⁴ Peterson, ‘Shell-shocked in Somerville’, 35.

Gradually, Brittain is confronted by the fullest horrors of the war. She sees two amputees in a courtyard at Somerville, then, in her first days as a volunteer nurse she tends to a wounded man, washing from his body the mud and blood that still lingers from the trenches.²⁵ The camera lingers in close-up on the intimate, tactile nature of the act, establishing a connection between Vera and the experience of battle that will be intensified later. She thinks she hears the nameless man call her name (he really says “sister”), and the film quickly cuts to a close-up of Roland. The damaged man lying before her is painful first-hand evidence of the peril faced by her fiancée, brother, and friends at the front. She hears news of Roland’s death soon after. Victor is admitted to her hospital, blinded by a gas attack, and he, too, soon dies. At a French field hospital, service just behind the lines brings her even closer to the male experience of the war. The typical visual iconography, save the trenches themselves, is present: the mud and churned-up ground, through which she must constantly struggle; the rain; the dead and wounded men, bloodied, bandaged, missing limbs, crying out in pain and grief; seemingly endless swathes of them outside on stretchers (a rising crane shot of which alludes the famous shot of Confederate soldiers in *Gone With the Wind* [1939], Figure 11), the medical tents and huts already full. Among these men are a German soldier to whom she provides comfort as he dies and, as Vera discovers to her terror, her brother Edward. She pulls him back from the brink of death, only to hear, upon returning home, that the “war still got him.” These France sequences are visually similar to the short scenes, imagined by Vera, of Roland and Edward at the front that pierce the narrative, their bleak, monotone palette and anxiously moving camera a stark contrast to the calm, bright lustre of pre-war scenes set in Britain. In this way the most traumatic male experiences of the war are almost matched by her own. It seems inevitable, then, given her sufferings – of profound personal loss, witness of unimaginable levels of death and destruction, experience of the dire physical conditions – that her mind would react in much the same way.

²⁵ Somerville was the site of a military hospital during the First World War, which counted Siegfried Sassoon and Robert Graves among its patients. See Pauline Adams, *Somerville for Women: An Oxford College, 1879-1993* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 93.



Fig. 11. *Testament of Youth* evokes *Gone With the Wind*'s famous crane shot in illustrating the sheer scale and unmanageability of wounded with which Brittain and the other nurses must cope.

The film certainly draws parallels between Brittain and the shell-shocked man, although it shies away from representing much of the more explicit allusions to the psychological consequences of her war service that the real-life Brittain made in her memoir.²⁶ In interpreting the figure of the shell-shocked woman, it is impossible for the film to turn to the feminine “other” – by far the most common filmic mode of representing such a figure, as we have explored in a number of films so far – to illustrate her condition. Nor can it portray her transformation as masculine, since it is its very breakdown from which war neurosis emerges. The film relies, then, on more unconventional approaches to illustrating Brittain's trauma – though none we have not seen before. One might recall *All Quiet on the Western Front*'s Kat telling the new recruits to bury themselves, bestially, deep into the earth, into Mother Nature – in order to manage their fright when under bombardment – as Vera does the same, on her hands and knees, pressing her hands into and covering her face with mud, upon hearing of the death of her brother.

Her plight also evokes a sense of profound post-war alienation, a traumatic effect that haunted Jake Barnes in *The Sun Also Rises*, Paul Bäumer in *All Quiet*, and, in a sense, Smithy in *Random Harvest*. We may remember the latter, in fact, as Vera pushes through the Armistice

²⁶ As Peterson notes, Brittain suffered hallucinations, delusions, nightmares, and insomnia that she attributed to ‘over-fatigue and excessive strain ... had I consulted an intelligent doctor immediately after the War,’ she writes, ‘I might have been spared the exhausting battle against nervous breakdown which I waged for eighteen months. But no one, least of all myself, realised how near I had drifted to the borderland of craziness.’ Peterson, ‘Shell-shocked in Somerville’, 35; Vera Brittain, *Testament of Youth* (London: Virago, 2004; first published 1933), 455.

Day crowd at the beginning and towards the end of her film, just as Smithy does at the beginning of his. It is not amnesia in this case, of course, from which Vera is suffering, but from the trauma of four years of hostilities that have been even tougher on her than it has on most at the home front. The new world in which she finds herself seems unrecognisable. Her pre-war idylls, represented as such in the warmth and serenity of the pre-war sequences' visuals, are 'a vanished world,' she wrote. 'Never again, for me and for my generation, was there to be any festival the joy of which no cloud would darken and no remembrance invalidate.'²⁷ The loss of three close male companions stand as a symbol of the losses suffered by the country at large. The film emphasises the absence of man in a series of shots that mirror three earlier scenes: formerly sites of playfulness and mirth, of happy moments shared by Vera and her companions, they are now quiet, empty, and still. It is a world in which the war's survivors are "surrounded by ghosts," one in which she cannot return to pre-war normalcy, in which, when Miss Lorimer pragmatically informs her that it's "Chaucer this term... you've certainly got some catching up to do," such matters as her Oxford education, a dream that she fought so determinedly to realise, now seem meaningless.

The film does not forget the psychological ordeals of men. When Roland returns from the front on leave, not long before his death, only Vera is allowed to see the impact that leading men to their deaths (as a member of the upper-classes and therefore a commissioned officer, despite his young age), seeing their "brains blown out," has had upon his psyche. To his male friends he presents a façade of healthy manliness; he must not appear to be "soft." Alone with Vera, he is vulnerable; trying but failing to "not think about" the fear of returning to the line. It is something, he puts to her, that she cannot understand, little to know just how much she *will* come to understand his experiences through her own. This is a typical representation of shell shock, a portrait of the 'fast-fading bravado and ill-concealed terror of boys at war' that has dominated films about the Great War, and that here serves only to augment our sense of

²⁷ Brittain, *Testament of Youth*, 73. She is writing here of attending Uppingham School (the public school attended by her brother and friends) Speech Day, 1914, which she describes as the 'lovely legacy' of this 'vanished world'; 'the one perfect summer idyll that I ever experienced, as well as my last care-free entertainment before the Flood' (72-3).

Britain's trauma.²⁸ This final meeting of Vera and her doomed fiancée, her intimate encounter with his shell shock, is just a single step on the path to her own. Ultimately, the male experience of the war is secondary: this is the first film since Lillian Gish stumbled fragile and ethereal through the battlefields of *Hearts of the World*, in search of her missing love, to depict the direct traumatic effects of the Great War on the female, and the first ever to do so with any historical understanding, abstention from gendered stereotyping, complexity, or sensitivity.

²⁸ Guy Lodge, 'London Film Review: "Testament of Youth"', *Variety* (14 October 2014) <www.variety.com/2014/film/festivals/london-film-review-testament-of-youth-1201329528/>.

Conclusion

*The Great War has a taste as of ashes to it.
To celebrate ... is an impossible response.*

Jay Winter,
Lecture to the British Academy, London, 2014¹

The First World War occupies a very specific space in the history of cinema. As Andrew Kelly asserts in *Cinema and the Great War*, after playing a central role in wartime propaganda, film has adopted a very different mode of reflecting on the conflict. It is those films that have been critical of the war that, he says, have been – and in many cases will continue to be – remembered.² At the centre of these narratives, so often, has been the subject of this thesis: the shell-shocked man, perhaps the most evocative emblem of the misery of the Great War. As the analyses here have shown, filmmakers have moulded shell shock and its gendered connotations in a variety of ways and for a variety of reasons. Sufferers have been feminised, infantilised, and animalised – sometimes a combination of all three – in service of narratives that range from overtly pacifistic to staunchly neutral in looking at both the First World War itself and the historical contexts in which they were made. However, with the exception of the propaganda films discussed in chapter one, and perhaps *Random Harvest*, analysed in chapter three, shell shock has never strayed from being in some way central to the dominant filmic memory of a brutal, squalid, hopeless, senseless, and above all catastrophic war. A war that, as Winter rightly points out, should be impossible to celebrate, or glorify, in either a real-life or cinematic sense. After all, how could it not be central? The image of the ‘soldier driven mad by war,’ to again borrow Winter’s phrase, ‘stands for the madness of war itself,’ and in his eyes we can see all the horror and injustice that so many suffered at its hands.³ Where cinema *has* drifted away from this negative characterisation of the war and into the realm of the patriotic and adventurous,

¹ Winter, ‘Emotional History’.

² Kelly, *Cinema and the Great War*, 1.

³ Winter, ‘Emotional History’.

as it occasionally has in the likes of, for example, *Sergeant York* (see chapter three) or *Flyboys* (see chapter six), shell shock has been predictably, and often conspicuously, absent.

There is a clear separation between cinematic shell shock and its historical counterpart. As a martial, medical, social and political phenomenon shell shock was and is complex and multi-layered, and scholarly work has often moved away from gender and positioned it in different socio-cultural contexts, especially in recent decades.⁴ As the extensive group of symptoms listed in the introduction indicate, it was also a broadly defined malady. Filmic treatments have frequently taken advantage of this and focussed on aspects of the disorder that are particularly conducive to narrative and visual storytelling: amnesia being perhaps the most prevalent, with hallucinations, alienation, and alcoholism also common. The films here are, also, dominated by men, as chapter six illustrates. They have tended to follow, as contemporary scholars such as Tracey Loughran would have it, rather limited views of the condition as essentially masculine – views popularised by the work of Elaine Showalter and others.⁵ This does not, of course, preclude its power as a tool of anti-war rhetoric. It has long been understood that shell shock was a normal, human reaction to the stresses of war – ‘the logical and necessary outcome of the realities of modern combat’⁶ – clouded by the gendered prejudices of the age, and this is what, I believe, shines through when we look at the filmic canon of shell shock. The dominant cinematic image of shell shock is not the feminised, infantilised, or animalised man. It is, at its heart, an image of *human* suffering, and in this way, cinema’s version of shell shock is greater than the sum of its parts.

It is surprising, given shell shock’s ubiquity in the historical, public, and cinematic conception of the First World War, that it has been so conspicuously absent in film studies scholarship on the topic. This study has looked to contribute to the filling of this gap, however it is far from comprehensive. As I explained in the introduction, it has been necessarily limited to an Anglo-American focus. It must necessarily fall, then, to a separate study to delineate the

⁴ Tracey Loughran, ‘A Crisis of Masculinity? Re-writing the History of Shell-shock and Gender in First World War Britain’, *History Compass*, 11:9 (2013), 727.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Leed, *No Man’s Land*, 180.

representation of war neuroses in the cinemas of France and Germany, whose filmographies on the subject are as rich and varied as Britain and America's, encompassing major texts as diverse as Abel Gance's *J'accuse* (1919) and his sound remake (1938); Robert Weine's *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1920); Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (1927); G. W. Pabst's *Westfront 1918* (1930); Heinz Paul's German-language version of *Journey's End*, *Die andere Seite* (*The Other Side*, 1931); Raymond Bernard's *Wooden Crosses* (1932); and Jean-Pierre Jeunet's *A Very Long Engagement* (2004), for a start.⁷ There are also the sparse contributions of nations less central in the memory of the war, whose very subordination to the "big four" of the United Kingdom, United States, France, and Germany may be revealing of their conception of the war and its traumas: for example Australia (*Gallipoli*, 1981, for instance); Canada (*Passchendaele*, 2008); and Italy (*Uomini contro/Many Wars Ago*, 1970). Any all-encompassing academic consideration of shell shock on film must include these important texts. I have, I hope, kick-started the process here, but there is ample room for further research.

At the beginning of this study I wondered whether, as one of our closest cultural connections to the past, film could play a role in influencing the wider understanding of the First World War through the visual and narrative treatment of its traumas. It is important to distinguish, I think, between *intellectual* or *historical* and *emotional* understanding here: the restrictions of cinematic shell shock, as described above, surely limit the amount of medical or historical fact we can glean from them. They can tell us about the prevailing social attitudes of the time, but as we have seen, they have often revealed more about the context in which they were created than the Great War itself, and there are other problems, too. Many of these films have focussed on individual, atypical examples – such as Sassoon and Rivers in *Regeneration* – to represent a wide-reaching and complex phenomenon, and there is always a tendency for creative interpretation and omission of historical fact in service of an interesting story. After

⁷ Certain examples of French and German cinema's representation of shell shock have been explored, though examples are sparse. The most comprehensive of these is probably Anton Kaes' *Shell Shock Cinema: Weimar Culture and the Wounds of War* (Princeton, NJ; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), though his approach focusses on the effect of trauma in a national sense, that of World War I on German society and national identity, rather than the representation of individual mental trauma, as much of my work has done. Jay Winter, also, has used film examples to support his historical analyses, most notably *J'accuse* and *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*. See Winter, 'Shell shock', 325-26; Winter, 'Emotional History'.

all, with rare exceptions (*War Neuroses*, for example) these films are, first and foremost, entertainment. However, shell shock has undoubtedly played a vital role in helping cinema to shape the ways in which we have understood the war on an emotional level. As Kelly contends, '[t]he classic films about the war showed that cinema could transform the views of its audience without putting in jeopardy the provision of entertainment.'⁸ As one part of a wider cultural legacy that also includes literature, music, and related visual art forms, cinema has helped to give widespread emotional currency to the image of the war already established, historically and intellectually: an image of meaningless massacre and profound human tragedy surrounding the central cinematic figure of the shell-shocked soldier.

⁸ Kelly, *Cinema and the Great War*, 142.

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Filmography

Key Films

All Quiet on the Western Front (1930)

USA, Universal

Directed by Lewis Milestone, screenplay by Maxwell Anderson, Del Andrews, George Abbott & C. Gardner Sullivan from the novel by Erich Maria Remarque

Cast: Lew Ayres, Louis Wolheim, Arnold Lucy, Ben Alexander, John Wray, Walter Browne Rogers, Owen Davis, Jr., William Bakewell, Russell Gleason, Harold Goodwin, Slim Summerville, Richard Alexander, Scott Kolk

The Battle of the Somme (1916)

UK, British Topical Committee for War Films

Geoffrey Malins & John McDowell (cinematographers)

Deathwatch (2002)

UK/Germany, Lionsgate

Written and directed by Michael J. Bassett

Cast: Jamie Bell, Laurence Fox, Andy Serkis, Hugo Speer, Kris Marshall, Matthew Rhys, Hugh O'Connor, Dean Lennox Kelly, Torben Liebrecht

Hearts of the World (1918)

USA, Paramount

Directed by D. W. Griffith, screenplay by Griffith as Capt. Victor Marier & M. Gaston de Tognac

Cast: Lillian Gish, Robert Harron, Dorothy Gish, Erich von Stroheim, Ben Alexander

Journey's End (1930)

UK/USA, Woolf & Freedman Film Service/Tiffany Pictures

Directed by James Whale, screenplay by Joseph Moncure March from the original play by R. C. Sherriff

Cast: Colin Clive, Ian Maclaren, David Manners, Billy Bevan, Anthony Bushell, Robert Adair, Charles K. Gerrard

King & Country (1964)

UK, Warner-Pathé/Allied Artists

Directed by Joseph Losey, screenplay by Evan Jones from the play by John Wilson and the novel *Return to the Wood* by James Lansdale Hodson

Cast: Tom Courtenay, Dirk Bogarde, Barry Foster, Leo McKern, Peter Copley

***Mrs Dalloway* (1997)**

UK/USA/Netherlands, First Look International

Directed by Marleen Gorris, screenplay by Eileen Atkins from the novel by Virginia Woolf

Cast: Vanessa Redgrave, Natascha McElhone, Rupert Graves, Amelia Bullmore, Alan Cox,
Michael Kitchen, Lena Headey

***Paths of Glory* (1957)**

USA, United Artists

Directed by Stanley Kubrick, screenplay by Kubrick, Calder Willingham & Jim Thompson
from the novel by Humphrey Cobb

Cast: Kirk Douglas, Adolphe Menjou, George Macready, Ralph Meeker, Joe Turkel, Timothy
Carey, Richard Anderson

***Random Harvest* (1942)**

USA, Metro-Goldwyn-Meyer

Directed by Mervyn LeRoy, screenplay by George Froeschel, Claudine West & Arthur
Wimperis from the novel by James Hilton

Cast: Ronald Colman, Greer Garson, Susan Peters, Philip Dorn, Henry Travers

***Regeneration* (aka *Behind the Lines*, 1997)**

UK/Canada, Artificial Eye

Directed by Gillies MacKinnon, screenplay by Allan Scott from the novel by Pat Barker

Cast: Jonathan Pryce, James Wilby, Jonny Lee Miller, Stuart Bunce, Tanya Allen, John Neville

***The Return of the Soldier* (1982)**

UK, Twentieth Century Fox

Directed by Alan Bridges, screenplay by Hugh Whitemore from the novel by Rebecca West

Cast: Alan Bates, Julie Christie, Ann-Margaret, Glenda Jackson, Ian Holm, Frank Finlay

***The Sun Also Rises* (1957)**

USA, Twentieth Century Fox

Directed by Henry King, screenplay by Peter Viertel from the novel by Ernest Hemingway

Cast: Tyrone Power, Ava Gardner, Errol Flynn, Mel Ferrer, Eddie Albert

***Testament of Youth* (2014)**

UK, Lionsgate

Directed by James Kent, screenplay by Juliette Towhidi from the memoir by Vera Brittain

Cast: Alicia Vikander, Kit Harrington, Taron Egerton, Emily Watson, Colin Morgan,
Miranda Richardson, Dominic West

***The Trench* (1999)**

UK/France, Arts Council of England

Written and directed by William Boyd

Cast: Paul Nicholls, James D'Arcy, Daniel Craig, Julian Rhind-Tutt, Danny Dyer

***War Neuroses* (1917)**

UK, British Pathé/Wellcome Trust

Dr. (later Sir) Arthur Hurst & Dr. J. L. M. Symms with the Royal Army Medical Corps, the Medical Research Committee and Netley (Hampshire) and Seale Hayne (Devon) Military Hospitals

***Woman to Woman* (1929)**

UK, Woolf & Freedman Film Service/Tiffany Pictures

Directed by Victor Saville, screenplay by Nicholas Fodor from an original play by Michael Morton

Cast: George Barraud, Betty Compson, Juliette Compton

Other Films

A Farewell to Arms (dir. Charles Vidor, USA, 1957)

A Farewell to Arms (dir. Frank Borzage, USA, 1932)

A Very Long Engagement (dir. Jean-Pierre Jeunet, France, 2004)

Aces High (dir. Jack Gold, UK/France, 1976)

The African Queen (dir. John Huston, USA/UK, 1951)

Apocalypse Now (dir. Francis Ford Coppola, USA, 1979)

The Battle of Coronel and Falkland Islands (dir. Walter Summers, UK, 1927)

The Battle of Jutland (dir. H. Bruce Woolfe, UK, 1921)

The Big Parade (dir. King Vidor, USA, 1925)

The Birth of a Nation (dir. D. W. Griffith, USA, 1915)

The Blue Max (dir. John Guillermin, UK, 1966)

Broken Lullaby (aka *The Man I Killed*, dir. Ernst Lubitsch, USA, 1932)

The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari (dir. Robert Weine, Germany, 1920)

Comradeship (dir. Maurice Elvey, UK, 1919)

The Cruel Sea (dir. Charles Frend, UK, 1953)

The Dam Busters (dir. Michael Anderson, UK, 1955)

Dawn (dir. Herbert Wilcox, UK, 1928)

The Dawn Guard (dir. Roy Boulting, UK, 1941)

The Dawn Patrol (dir. Edmund Goulding, USA, 1938)

The Dawn Patrol (dir. Howard Hawks, USA, 1930)

The Deer Hunter (dir. Michael Cimino, USA, 1978)

Die andere Seite (*The Other Side*, dir. Heinz Paul, Germany, 1931)

Dr. Strangelove (dir. Stanley Kubrick, UK/USA, 1964)

The Fighting 69th (dir. William Keighley, USA, 1940)
First Blood (dir. Ted Kotcheff, USA, 1982)
Flyboys (dir. Tony Bill, UK/USA, 2006)
Full Metal Jacket (dir. Stanley Kubrick, UK/USA, 1987)
Gallipoli (dir. Peter Weir, Australia, 1981)
The Gentle Sex (dir. Leslie Howard, UK, 1943)
Gold Diggers of 1933 (dirs. Mervyn LeRoy & Busby Berkeley, USA, 1933)
Gone With the Wind (dir. Victor Fleming, USA, 1939)
Goodbye, Billy: America Goes to War, 1917-18 (USA, 1972)
The Great Escape (dir. John Sturges, USA, 1963)
The Guns of Loos (dir. Sinclair Hill, UK, 1928)
Hedd Wyn (dir. Paul Turner, Wales, 1992)
The Hireling (dir. Alan Bridges, UK, 1973)
The Hours (dir. Stephen Daldry, UK/USA, 2002)
I Am a Fugitive from a Chain Gang (dir. Mervyn LeRoy, USA, 1932)
In Love and War (dir. Richard Attenborough, USA, 1996)
J'accuse (I Accuse) (dir. Abel Gance, France, 1919)
J'accuse! (dir. Abel Gance, France, 1938)
Jarhead (dir. Sam Mendes, USA/UK, 2005)
Johnny Got His Gun (dir. Dalton Trumbo, USA, 1971)
Lawrence of Arabia (dir. David Lean, UK/USA, 1962)
Legends of the Fall (dir. Edward Zwick, USA, 1994)
Let There Be Light (dir. John Huston, USA, 1946)
The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp (dirs. Michael Powell & Emeric Pressburger, UK, 1943)
The Martyrdom of Nurse Cavell (dirs. John Gavin & C. Post Mason, Australia, 1916)
Metropolis (dir. Fritz Lang, Germany, 1927)
Mons (dir. Walter Summers, UK, 1926)
The National Film (UK, 1918)
Nurse Cavell (dir. W. J. Lincoln, Australia, 1916)
Nurse Edith Cavell (dir. Herbert Wilcox, USA, 1939)
Oh! What a Lovely War (dir. Richard Attenborough, UK, 1969)
Passchendaele (dir. Paul Gross, Canada, 2008)
Pearl Harbor (dir. Michael Bay, USA, 2001)
Platoon (dir. Oliver Stone, USA, 1986)
Private Peaceful (dir. Pat O'Connor, UK, 2012)
The Road Back (dir. James Whale, USA, 1937)
The Roaring Twenties (dir. Raoul Walsh, USA, 1939)
Sergeant York (dir. Howard Hawks, USA, 1941)
Suspense (dir. Walter Summers, UK, 1930)
Tell England (dirs. Anthony Asquith & Geoffrey Barkas, UK, 1931)
Triumph of the Will (dir. Leni Riefenstahl, Germany, 1935)
Uomini contro (Many Wars Ago) (dir. Francesco Rosi, Italy, 1970)

Von Richthofen and Brown (ask *The Red Baron*, dir. Roger Corman, USA, 1971)
War Horse (dir. Steven Spielberg, USA, 2011)
Westfront 1918 (dir. G. W. Pabst, Germany, 1930)
What Price Glory (dir. John Ford, USA, 1952)
What Price Glory? (dir. Raoul Walsh, USA, 1926)
Wilson (dir. Henry King, USA, 1944)
The Woman the Germans Shot (dir. John G. Adolphi, USA, 1918)
Woman to Woman (dir. Graham Cutts, UK, 1923)
Woman to Woman (dir. Maclean Rogers, UK, 1946)
Wooden Crosses (dir. Raymond Bernard, France, 1932)
Ypres (dir. Walter Summers, UK, 1925)
Zeppelin (dir. Étienne Périer, UK, 1971)

Television

A Dangerous Man: Lawrence After Arabia (TV film, ITV, dir. Christopher Menaul, UK, 1992)
A Woman in Love and War: Vera Brittain (BBC, UK, 2008)
All Quiet on the Western Front (TV film, CBS, dir. Delbert Mann, USA/UK, 1979)
Birdsong (Miniseries, BBC, UK, 2012)
Blackadder Goes Forth (BBC, UK, 1989)
Boardwalk Empire (HBO, UK, 2010-2014)
Britain's Great War (BBC, UK, 2014)
Downton Abbey (ITV, UK, 2010-15)
The Great War (BBC, UK, 1964)
Journey's End (TV film, BBC, dir. Michael Simpson, UK, 1988)
The Lost Battalion (TV film, A&E, dir. Russell Mulcahy, USA, 2001)
Not Forgotten (Channel 4, UK, 2005-09)
Parade's End (Miniseries, BBC, UK, 2012)
Peaky Blinders (BBC, UK, 2013-present)
The Somme (Channel 4, UK, 2005)
The Somme: From Defeat to Victory (BBC, UK, 2006)
The Sun Also Rises (TV film, NBC, dir. James Goldstone, USA, 1984)
Testament of Youth (BBC, UK, 1979)
To Serve Them All My Days (BBC, UK, 1980-81)
To the Lighthouse (TV film, BBC, dir. Colin Gregg, UK, 1983)
The Unknown Soldier (TV film, ITV, dir. David Drury, UK, 1998)
War of Words: Soldier-Poets of the Somme (BBC, UK, 2014)
Wilfred Owen: A Remembrance Tale (BBC, UK, 2007)